



# The Gleaner 2003-2004

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# 2003-2004 Gleaner Staff

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### REMEMBER THUSE DAYS

before we grew up,
they were warm and the sun shone down
with a fierceness
that tanned our shoulders
and burned our noses.
We never wore sunscreen
like our mothers warned us to.
Careless and carefree
farm kids with callused feet

and an endless summer freedom that seemed to stretch forever, after the days work was done.

Running from the fields, with the afternoon sun throwing our shadows before us we'd splash into the creek

and feel the cool mud slip between our toes.

Granddad would bring watermelons and we would sit on the bank with our feet in the water and bite into the sweetest fruit we'd ever eaten.

At least that's what it tasted like after a long day

of planting.

By the time we made it to the house on those hot afternoons

our clothes would be dry from piling into the back of the truck and letting the summer breeze wash over us.

Grandma would have dinner on the table

but she'd be waiting at the door,

making sure we wiped our feet and washed our hands before sitting down at her table.

After dinner

we'd go down to the blueberry bushes and pick baskets full

To put on our ice cream. I remember blueberry lips

and stained fingertips

and I can still taste that sweet burst of flavor.

It tasted like innocence,

the innocence of our childhood Before we grew up.

~Shelby Watson~

## My Sweet Boy...

It's hard to travel when the road is rocky and meanders in the dark of night; So many uncertainties to complicate life.

Makes me flighty.

But on your back it clicks like a switch and our path together becomes clearly lit with The road straight and paved. We dance.



#### Photo by Noelle Luccioni

Cur hearts and souls heat in perfect cadence.

Each of your great steps shakes the earth proclaiming

"Here WE are, the puzzle completed"

And I feel my heart, with each step, beating its energy down into yours then straight to the Ground as a wild but gentle force.

I am grateful to you for this amesome connection.

Few are able to comprehend the indescribable nexus between horse and vider; Even fewer will experience it.

I am honored.

You have always been a source of calming, comfort and strength.

Even now, you give me motivation to go on.

Your witty ways still make me laugh.

Now it seems our time has expired,

Be strong' Our promises are simply delayed, not broken For your breath I'll be waiting, when we can dance as before.

We need to be patient,

Fate will have us again.

-Elizabeth Woodward

#### The Gospel According to Hamlet

My Uncle Earl was ninety- three years old the summer I got to know him. He had lived in the same town his whole life. It was the little town my mother grew up in. It is located in Central Illinois and it is called Blue Mound. It is called Blue Mound, because of two little hills not far from the center of the town. The glaciers left the two mounds there in the Pleistocene ice age. Blue Mound was as far as the glaciers pushed south, plowing up rocks and dirt in front of their creeping advance. When everything is so flat and featureless, two little piles of stones and dirt are enough to name a town.

My Uncle Earl had run the grain elevator in this town of 800 people for many years. He had retired at age 58 and so he had been retired for 35 years when I started to visit with him. He had become rich by running the grain elevator. I understood that a lot of people envied my uncle. For thirty-five years, he had lived a life that had been conspicuous because of a lack of work on his part. It is expensive cars, big houses, and celebrities that impress people in places like California. In Blue Mound, almost everyone has to work like a dog all their lives to scratch out a bare living. Someone who so obviously hadn't worked in three and a half decades stood out for admiration and for envy.

I was thirteen years old at the time and I was stuck spending the summer in Blue Mound with my grand-mother. I had traveled out there by myself on the train from Philadelphia. That had been a big deal. It was a trip full of excitement and uncertainty. After three days in Blue Mound, I had been out to the family cemetery, to the old family farm, and to see the cannon at the center of town. Boring, boring, and boring. I had met my grandmother's friends and there was not one I wanted to spend time with again. They were all nice, but melancholy. All they talked about was the weather or some other potential catastrophe. Farmers are never happy. It has either rained too much or too little or it may not rain for a while or it is too hot for the corn to tassel or it is too cool for the corn to grow. Let's not even go into insects.

The truth was that my visit was not very enjoyable for my grandmother either. From her standpoint, I had far too much "Eastern" upbringing. (To my grandmother, "Eastern" was a disease that began in Ohio and got worse the closer you got to the ocean.) To keep me entertained, she tried to pack a year's worth of activities (for a Blue Mound child) into the next few days, only to see me accomplish the following:

- Because I was crazy about baseball, my grandmother drove me down to an amusement center that had batting cages. I picked one to try. I got in the cage with my bat and helmet and quickly realized that the ball was coming in far too fast for my level of batting skill. I kept swinging way late. I was getting more and more frustrated. A young male voice behind me and outside the cages said, "Swing when it comes through the hole". He meant I should start my swing just as the machine released the ball. The voice was friendly and not critical. To emphasize his point, he started to say "swing" just as the machine flung the ball at me. I transferred my anger at myself to the voice. I turned and said, "If you can do any better, you get in here when it's your turn. Otherwise, shut up." My tone was not very cordial. When I got out of the cage without having hit a single ball, I saw my advisor. He was a boy about my age. He had two artificial arms. My grandmother was furious; she didn't believe me when I said I hadn't seen his arms before I spoke.
- Next, my grandmother took me to a town fair. It was pretty lame to me, with the new model tractors on display, prizes for the biggest melons ... One event was a cakewalk. When I asked what a cakewalk was, the answer was about raising money for the new firehouse. I watched the first one and realized it was musical chairs where the person who got the last chair won a cake. I paid a dollar of my own money and entered the next game. There were mostly kids my age or younger in the contest. I won the game by body blocking kids away from my chair of choice each time the music stopped. As I walked away with my prize, one farmer remarked to my grandmother, "He really must love cake." She must have been humiliated.
  - A sixteen-year-old girl that my grandmother had often watched for her parents was in a softball

tournament in Decatur. My grandmother took me along even though I told her I would rather watch the corn grow. But at the game, I enjoyed myself. The girls were a little awkward, but a couple of them were kind of cute. There were an amazing number of strange plays, like three runners ending up on the same base. One heavy-set girl on the other team was playing first base. She let a slow grounder go through her legs. I booed. Granny was horrified. Everyone in the stands turned and stared at me. She said to no one in particular, "Don't mind him, he is growing up in Philadelphia". Some nodded and others just shook their heads.

I told my mother that I wanted to come home when she called that week. She said it would take time to get used to a different style of living. I told her that I'd rather watch a Gomer Pyle marathon than stay in Blue Mound. She asked if I had seen Uncle Earl and I told her I had not. She suggested that I go see him and take the present that she had put in my luggage to give him. She cautioned me again that my Aunt May was not to see the present. I knew what the present was. It was a box of cigars. The smell from the present had permeated all the clothing in my luggage. It was not a smell that I liked.

My grandmother called over to talk to Aunt May. The two elderly ladies agreed that I should go over that afternoon. Uncle Earl would have the Cubs game on the radio. That way, if I were too bored by Uncle Earl, I would have something to do. I just looked at my grandmother when she related this logic to me. If she thought that Uncle Earl was boring compared to the life that she led, I was doomed. She cautioned me to speak loudly because Uncle Earl was hard of hearing. If he fell asleep (as he often did), I could just come on back to my grandmother's house.

At 2PM, I walked over to Uncle Earl's house. Aunt May met me at the door. I had already seen her four or five times during my visit and I was completely out of conversation to have with her. She told me to go out to the back porch where Uncle Earl was going to listen to the game. I carried the box of cigars under my shirt (on the side away from her) with my arm pinning the box against my side. I found my way back to the porch.

A very old looking little man was sitting in a rocking chair. There was a table near by with a large radio on it. The little old guy was engaged in tuning the radio. He had a St. Louis Cardinal's baseball cap on. Remembering the advice I had gotten from my grandmother, I shouted at him, "Is the game on yet?" He flinched a little and slowly turned his head in my direction.

He had on thick glasses that framed his nose and caused it to be his most prominent feature. The heavy lines on his face running along side the nose helped it to be the initial focus. He had ears which were too big for his head and little wisps of white hair stuck out from under the baseball cap. But, the eyes were different. They were dark and lively and didn't seem at all like the tired eyes I was used to seeing in the elderly.

He looked at me and said, "You don't have to try to raise the dead to talk to me. I'm not there yet." I was embarrassed. I mumbled something about what my grandmother had said about his hearing. He apparently heard every word of my mumbling.

"I have that reputation. I don't do much to correct the impression with most people. It's one of the only advantages of being old. It's a way you can pretty much be left alone. If I don't like something someone is saying I either pretend not to hear or I fall asleep. I still have to listen to it, but I don't have to respond. Eventually they go off and bother someone else."

I thought he might be including me in the bothering category. I asked if he wanted to be left alone now. He smiled. He still seemed to have a lot of his teeth. "I didn't mean you. At least I don't mean that yet." His smile got broader. "Besides, I suspect that under your shirt you either have your lunch or something for me."

I told him it was a present from my mother. I took it out from under my shirt and handed it to him. The wrapping paper was a little damp from being under my shirt on a hot summer day. I hoped he wouldn't notice.

"Jeanie has always taken care of me." He looked at the doorway to see if May was coming as he took the present. He tore off the wrapping paper and held the box of cigars delicately in his hands like it was a fine antique. He leaned over and opened a door in the table that supported the radio. In the compartment inside I could see five or six boxes of cigars. "These are special," he said of the new box of cigars. "I'm going to save these until the Cardinals win the World Series this fall."

"Don't hold your breath", I blurted out. "The Phillies are going to win this year." It was an outburst that didn't show much respect. But it was 1964 and the great Philadelphia collapse was still a couple months away. I had been hooked on baseball for a few years, but that year was already special to me. My dad had taken me to a Phillies game at Connie Mack stadium to see the Dodgers when his client had backed out at the last minute. Sandy Kofax had pitched a no hitter. I remember a beautiful blonde girl three rows in front of us (on the third base side) who kept saying, "Come on, Sandy" before each pitch he threw. In the first few innings, people were telling her to shut up (or worse). But by the eighth inning, it seemed to me that I was the only one rooting for the Phillies. I had considered that night to be a tragedy. However, Jim Bunning on Father's Day had pitched a perfect game that I had watched on TV. That had been a triumph. I felt in my heart that the Phillies were going to win the pennant. My Uncle did not share my enthusiasm.

"Not enough pitching", he said about the Phillies. "That manager of yours will be flogging a dead horse by the end of August. The Cardinals put themselves in position to win by stealing Brock from the Cubs." He smiled at his double meaning.

I heard the national anthem playing on the radio. I sat down in a chair directly across from Uncle Earl. Behind him I could see a bookcase. It was filled with notebooks that had labels that just said 1963, 1962, 1961,... All the shelves were filled with these notebooks. Nodding at the bookshelf I asked, "What's in those notebooks? Stuff from the grain elevator?" He smiled again. "Baseball statistics."

"What are baseball statistics?"

"It's a record of every game played by the Cubs, Cardinals, White Sox, and Reds over the last ten years. Things like batting averages of the players, runs scored, errors, runs batted in – things like that. In the off season, I compile the statistics and cross-reference all the key figures."

"How do you get them?" I looked down. He had one of the notebooks in his lap and it was open to a baseball scorecard.

"I keep them myself. I can get the games of four major league teams from here on the porch. At night, sometimes I can even get the Yankees. If I miss a game, I can use the box score in the paper to get most of what I need." He was writing as he spoke. It looked like he was filling out a lineup card.

What followed was one of the most entertaining two-and-a-half hours I could ever remember having with an old person. He was twenty years older than May (and my grandmother), but his conversation and what he was interested in was much younger. As we listened to the game and kept score we would talk about trains, books I had read (I was reading Catcher in the Rye) and stamp collecting. He told me stories about my mother as a girl growing up in Blue Mound. Mainly, he told me stories about baseball and games he had seen. He predicted what each pitch of the game we were listening to would be and where it would be located before it was thrown. He called the pitches right most of the time. I couldn't believe how fast the game went by. I was sorry when it was over and I had to go back to my grandmother's house.

I went over to see Uncle Earl almost every day after that. We listened to game after game on the radio. He wouldn't watch baseball when it was on TV. He said that what the commentators said and what he saw were too different. He would rather picture in his head what was going on. He was a master of rapid-fire baseball anecdotes. He would jump decades in seconds, going from Rodger Connor to Chick Hafey to Louis Clark Brock to Frankie Frisch and back to Bobby Wallace. He knew about a lot of teams and players, but we mostly talked about his beloved Cardinals.

In a month, we must have listened to twenty games together. A lot of the games were Cubs games, because they were on during the afternoon. My grandmother started to get worried that I was spending too much time with Uncle Earl; that he was somehow corrupting me with his "strange ideas". But the only strange ideas I had heard up to that point, was that the players of 1964 couldn't hold a candle to Stan Musial or Rogers Hornsby or Cy Young. All except one. He put Bob Gibson in his own personal Cardinal Hall of Fame. Right in there with Enos Slaughter, "Uncle Robby" Robinson, and Mordecai "Three Fingers" Brown.

One memorable discussion happened one Sunday afternoon between the games of a doubleheader. Uncle Earl had just finished a story about a Saturday afternoon when he had taken my mother and grandfather to see a University of Illinois football game. They had gone to see Red Grange play and had taken along a picnic lunch of fried chicken. He seemed to remember every play of the game, the color of the sky, the sound of the marching band ..... everything. Then I remembered a question I had thought of that morning. I had spent an interminable morning in church sandwiched between my grandmother and Aunt May. It had occurred to me in the middle of the sermon that I had never seen Uncle Earl in church all summer. I asked him why he didn't go to church.

He looked up from his scorecard. He had been tallying all the numbers from the first game. I thought he winked at me. "I go to church with May four or five times a year. That keeps her happy. For me, these days there are more minuses to going to church than plusses. The benches are so hard that my back hurts for three days afterwards. And then there are the hymns. Can you sing any of the hymns? Just who decides what key those hymns are in? They are in a key that my voice can't find. And there is always someone sitting right behind you who wants to show off the operatic skill they never got to use except on a tractor." He paused and looked down at his notebook. "There are some things I still like about going. It brings back good memories. I can remember sitting between my father and mother on hot summer days, people waving fans, the buzz of insects, my mother whispering to me to stop fidgeting, the commanding voice of the minister first threatening eternal damnation and then in a warm voice offering the good news." He paused and then closed his notebook. "But four times a year is more than enough for me now."

"Aren't you afraid of what is going to happen to you if you don't go?" My grandmother had been using this as a way to get me to church on Sunday.

"You mean after I die?" I nodded.

"You are not going to get into heaven based on the number of times you go to church. God is not an attendance taker. I can contemplate God here on the porch as I listen to the baseball game. In fact, I often do. I think God must like this game; it's so elegant.

I don't need a minister's help to worship God. I've seen ministers come and go at that church. There have been twelve since your Aunt May and I got married there. They either died or moved on to more prosperous congregations. They all had two things in common: they all thought I wasn't giving enough money to the church and they knew that they held the key to my salvation. Each one was cocksure about answers to questions that any intelligent man should at least have some doubts about. Their answers to the real tricky questions were always the same. 'Take it on faith; there are some things

beyond our reason.' "He shook his head. "Don't question anything and take it on faith. I'd expect that kind of logic from an insurance salesman, but I want a more from my religion. It's good to ask questions about why something is the way it is. I don't know how God got to be all knowing without asking questions. Maybe he asks them through us. In my opinion, as long as you believe in something that has a positive effect on your life and those you love you'll be as saved as anybody else whether you go to church or not."

This was news to me. He must have seen the look on my face because he raised a bony hand and put it on my shoulder. "I'm an opinionated old man. Your grandmother says so all the time. You make up your own mind, but you be the one to make up your mind. You decide for yourself. In the end, if you have lived the best life you can, I don't think it matters whether you are a Christian, a Jew or a Buddhist.

You be like your grandfather. Finest man I ever knew. I always wanted to be like him. During the depression, he kept giving the farmers here more and more credit at the store. It ruined him financially. Your mother's first husband had been a lineman for the Rams. Years before he went off to the war and got himself killed in Italy, he had offered to go around and collect money owed to your grandfather, but your grandfather wouldn't hear of it. He said his neighbors were in enough trouble and he wouldn't make matters worse for them. The ministers at church can say 'love thy neighbor' all they want, but there was a man who lived it."

My head was swimming. I didn't know my mother had been married and then a widow because of World War Two. I was aware that my grandfather had owned a store, but I had no idea he had "lost" it. Over the next week, Uncle Earl supplied details of a family history he was in a unique position to talk about.

Then it was August, and suddenly it was time for me to go home. I went over to see Uncle Earl for the last time on the back porch. I sat there with a glass of lemonade while the Cubs were playing. I told Uncle Earl that I had really enjoyed spending time with him. He said that I was the best thing that had come along that summer with the possible exception of Lou Brock. He thanked me for all my help with the scoring and running little errands for him. He told me that he hoped he could help me when I got to his age. I told Uncle Earl that I would look forward to that, but he would be 173 years old at that point. "So what?" he said. "I have a theory that if you can live long enough, your body says, 'You win.' And you start to get younger. I hope to be the first to prove my theory."

I asked him how he got this idea and he said it was interpreted from Shakespeare. "If I prove the theory, I'll either drop out of sight to keep the doctors from dissecting me to see how I did it or I'll start a new religion. My good book for the new religion will be Shakespeare. Lots to choose from there. My first sermon will be from the book of Hamlet: 'Hell is empty, And all the devils are here.' I should use that one the next time May's second cousin comes to visit."

I left for home by train that afternoon. My mother met me the next day at the station. One of her first questions for me on the car ride home was the one she always used when I got home from school. She asked if I had learned anything.

My first thought was of Uncle Earl. I told her that being old might not be as bad as I thought it would be. Especially if you had a mind that worked like Uncle Earl's. I said I hoped that I had inherited the same genes that he had.

My mother looked at me and laughed a little. "I'm sorry to tell you this baby, but you are related to Uncle Earl by marriage. You are related to Aunt May by blood. She is you Grandmother's sister." I was crushed. And I felt stupid. I had known that Grandmother and May were sisters. Since we weren't English nobility I should have figured out that Uncle Earl couldn't be a blood relative.

My mother laughed at the look on my face. "It is Uncle Earl's curiosity and intelligence that have always

attracted me. He is a little blunt and says what he feels. He hurts some people's feelings when he really shouldn't. But he is always ready to dig into something and examine it from all sides. He puts a lot of energy into everything he does. It's this attitude I think you liked. You can carry an attitude like that with you no matter how old you get."

I only talked to Uncle Earl once more after I left Illinois. He called our house right after the Cardinals won the pennant that fall. I only talked to him for a few seconds. I was so heartbroken by the Phillies that I didn't want to talk about baseball. My mother tried to apologize for me, but Uncle Earl said he wouldn't want to talk to me if his Cardinals had collapsed like that. I could hear him laughing over the phone.

I regretted my petulance for years. Earl died three days later. He went quickly. He died just as his Cardinals were about to have a wonderful World Series against the Yankees. My mother was pretty heart-broken. Earl had been like a second father to her. I tried to think of something to make her feel better. I remembered the story about Red Grange and I reminded her of this. She looked at me through her tears and smiled a little. She said, "Do you know why I made your father buy a house in Abington when we moved to Philadelphia from Illinois?" I shook my head. "Because the mascot of Abington High School is a Galloping Ghost. After Red Grange."

The death had an effect on me. I had been thinking about God and death for weeks. Was Uncle Earl's death a sign? Was God punishing him for his lack of attendance at church or his lack of traditional faith? What kind of God would take him so close to something he was clearly living for? I didn't have any answers.

Four months later three boxes arrived. They were filled with Uncle Earl's notebooks on baseball. Uncle Earl had told May that he was changing his will a couple days after I left. This put May into a tizzy because she thought Earl capable of doing very strange things. She refused to call the lawyer for two weeks. But, all Earl wanted to do was to make sure that I got the baseball books and that May did not throw them out. Over the years, I liked to browse through the books when I had time to kill.

As I got older, I developed a habit of not taking anything on face value. I questioned everything. My

mother was happy about this unless I was questioning something that she had just said. When she said I was becoming like Uncle Earl, I would tell her it was a learned behavior; she couldn't blame genetics. I also developed a love for Shakespeare although this didn't happen until late in high school. I took a Shakespeare elective at Georgia Tech. It was a sure "A". At our school a maximum of three engineering students signed up for this course and the teacher was grateful that anyone showed up at all. I didn't miss a class. You haven't heard anything until you hear a young female professor from Alabama read The Bard in a heavy southern accent. It was during her reading of Hamlet that I heard something that struck a chord in the back of my mind. It was meant as an insult, but I thought of Earl. It went: "You yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am if like a crab you could go backward." That was probably the inspiration for the longevity theory he had talked about. It would have made a great second sermon.

~Larry Stelmach~

## Renaissance!

Ah! So poignant are our Autumn days,
When trees shed red and yellow and orange tears,
And shiver to think of Winter's rule,
Albino beauty, cold, austere.

Each twig bears a golden nugget small,
Waiting dormant for warming rays,
'Til those dear little buds change to sweet sticky leaves
and the trees blossom forth in leafy sprays!

~Dr. Karen Schramm



Photo by Chris Ochadlick

Photo by James R. Linden



She sat and watched the rain as it ran down the windowpane in little rivers. Behind her she could hear him getting ready. His morning sounds blended together into one soothing symphony that wrapped around her like an old flannel blanket. She smiled to herself and fell backwards onto the bed into the pile of mussed up sheets and pillows that still smelled faintly of their love, his cologne, and the Bounty sheets from yesterday's laundry. These cool fall mornings were her favorite, when she could cuddle and watch him get ready for work. Warm, safe, and satisfied in her bed, she would watch him move around. Pulling up jeans and putting on shirts, he'd wink at her from time to time, and she'd smile a sleepy smile as they talked about the coming day.

Hearing the water shut off brought her back from her reverie and she turned to see him come out of the bathroom. Wearing nothing but a white terrycloth towel he presented a tempting picture, and she smiled and bit her lip as he moved across the room. "Hey, baby, sure you really want to go to work?" she asked coyly as he opened the dresser drawer. He shot her a grin over his shoulder.

"Oh, honey, you wouldn't be trying to seduce me now, would you?" "That's right, cowboy, I would be," she answered.

"Well, then hold that thought, darlin', and when I get home from work we'll start from where we left off." He gave her another wicked smile and pulled a well-worn pair of jeans out of the drawer.

As he got dressed she cast another glance out the window. "Think it'll rain all day, hon?" He followed her gaze and nodded grimly. "Yea, probably." Neither one of them said anything in the silence that followed but they were both thinking the same thing. If too much more rain fell the fields would flood, and there would go all their money for the season. For a moment she shut her eyes and sighed. If it wasn't for Ethan's construction job, they'd never be able to keep the farm. One bad year after another and the falling markets had taken their toll on the area farmers, and she knew that although they were struggling, they were the lucky ones because her husband had his other job. Some of her friends weren't so lucky. Shaking her head, she climbed out of bed and headed to the bathroom.

A few minutes later she handed Ethan his lunch and gave him a quick kiss as he headed out the door. Going into the kitchen she pulled down two bowls and some cereal from the cabinets, and then headed towards the stairs. "Conner," she called as she climbed the steps, "time to get up, sweetie." Mornings always presented a challenge when it came to the youngest mem-

ber of the household, who liked his sleep just a little too much. Entering the bedroom, though, she had to grin. Sprawled across the bed with the blankets strewn everywhere lay Conner sleeping with his mouth wide open and emitting small childish snores. For a moment she just stood and watched him. Her precious nephew. He looked just like his mother, blond tousled hair, fair skin, and a sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of his nose. She remembered when her sister had complained about those freckles incessantly. "They make my nose look big, Ab, I swear!" she'd say as she peered into the mirror with a hopeless expression on her face. Abby would laugh and push her out of the way. "Mike thinks they're cute," she'd remind her sister. "Yeah he does, doesn't he?" she'd say a little brighter as she brushed out her long blond hair.

Looking at Conner now she thought she could see some of Mike in him as well, although it was most evident in the little boy's demeanor. Fiercely determined once he set his mind on things, he had Mike's drive. If only he could be driven to get up in the mornings, she thought wryly as she looked at the clock on the dresser and began pulling out his clothes for the day. Ten minutes later she was pouring milk for the still sleepy little boy that sat across from her at the table, and twenty minutes later she shifted the old Ford truck into gear and headed towards the main road. Stopping for a moment at the end of the driveway, she pulled out some envelopes and put them in the mailbox.

"What are those, Mommy?" Conner asked as he fiddled with something in his book bag. "Oh nothing, babe, just some bills," she answered as she pulled out onto the road. Bills that she and Ethan had sweated and prayed over last night as they sat at the kitchen table and listened to the rain pounding down overhead. They had managed to come out on top this time, although not by much. Shaking her head, she banished those negative thoughts and said to Conner, "So, buddy, how many days to go 'til the big day?" For the past month he'd been counting down the days until his sixth birthday, and every morning he reminded her and Ethan of just how many he had to go. "Eleven," he proudly announced as he gave her a huge grin. "And grandma's making the cake, right?" "She sure is, maybe tonight you should call and tell her what kind you'd like." "Chocolate!" he said, his eyes lighting up with anticipation. "Sounds good to me," she said as she patted him on the knee.

As they sat there waiting for the big yellow bus that would cart Conner off to school, Abby found herself watching him and wondering. Wondering what it would have been like of her sister was still here. The night that Mike and Sara had decided to drive to a bed and breakfast in the next town for a little weekend getaway was the night that Abby's whole world fell apart. The night she got the call. She still remembered everything she was doing when the phone rang. Elected babysitter for the weekend, she had just put Conner down to bed, and she was cleaning the kitchen and crooning to Patsy Kline when she heard the phone ring. Running to turn down the radio, she was out of breath by the time she reached the phone. Catching the number on the caller ID, she called, "Hey, Ma, how was the dinner?" as she picked up the phone. Her parents had gone to a birthday dinner for one of their friends that night, which was why she had gotten stuck with babysitting. Not that she minded. Her little nephew was an angel, and she

loved to watch him. "Mom?" she asked, as she smacked the phone. She couldn't hear anything and sometimes the phone acted weird. "Mom, you there?" She heard a muffled noise, and then her father came on the line. "Ab, honey, can you hear me?" His voice was tense and strained. "Dad, what's wrong? What's going on?" Abby said as fear started to creep into her veins. "We're at the hospital. Abby..." he paused and she clenched the phone tightly. "It's Sara and Mike...they've...they were in an accident." She froze at the words. "Accident, but they were just fine an hour ago," she protested, not wanting to believe it. Then her senses came rushing back to her. "Wait, what hospital, I'm coming, let me wake up Conner, I'll be there in-" "Ab" "ten minutes. Tell Sara I'm com-" "Ab!" her father's voice rose and then broke. She stopped mid-sentence, "Honey, there's no reason to come up here, Sara and Mike...they...well, they didn't make it, baby." She went numb. "What, of course they made it...what do you mean they didn't make it! They're fine, they're going to be fine, right? Right, Daddy?!" Her voice rose hysterically, and on the other end her father sobbed. "They're dead, baby, they're dead." Suddenly the room started to spin and then Abby felt herself sliding onto the cold linoleum floor. "Dead?" she whispered unbelievingly. "Listen," her father took a deep breath, "we're leaving the hospital now, we're coming to your house. Just, just hang in there, we're on our way." The phone went dead in her hand. She slowly brought it down and stared at it. This couldn't be happening. She blinked a couple times, and then it hit her. When her parents came in they found her on the floor curled up in a little ball, crying her heart out.

The funeral and the first couple weeks after the accident were still mostly a blur for her, but she knew that throughout it all Ethan was at her side. Without him she knew that she wouldn't have survived. Engaged at the time, their wedding was only two months away when Mike and Sara died. But Abby couldn't stand the thought of a big wedding now that her sister wasn't there to be her maid of honor, so they were married in a quiet ceremony with just a few family members at the little church that both had attended since childhood. It was a bittersweet day, and they had decided to postpone their honeymoon for a while, since neither one of them had felt like leaving town right then. They spend their wedding night quietly at home, in her house. They had decided that that's where they would live, since Ethan's house was smaller. It was also the night they decided to adopt Conner. The orphaned four-month-old had been living between Abby's house and her mother's since the accident. Knowing this couldn't go on much longer they had made a decision, they would raise Conner as their own.

Now as Abby watched him board the bus she thanked God for the millionth time that he was theirs. After giving him one last wave she pulled a u-turn and headed back to the house. As she climbed out of the cab she spotted Ryan, the college student that Ethan had hired to help around the farm part-time. Right now part-time help was all they could afford. Giving him a wave she bounded lightly up the porch steps and into the house.

Three hours later she'd accomplished most of the morning's tasks that she'd planned for herself, and was sitting down for a quick cup of tea when she got the call. It was Connor's school. Two minutes later she burst through the front door and flew over the steps. "Ry!" she

screamed, "Ryan!" He appeared in the doorway of the barn. "Get Ethan, go get Ethan!" she yelled as she flung open the truck door. "It's Conner!"

The ride to the hospital was a terrified blur. All she could think was please let him be okay, don't do this to me again. When she ran through the door of the waiting room, Conner's teacher jumped up to meet her. The next couple of minutes were a jumbled chaos of nurses, technicians, and mumbled medical terms. None of it made sense but she wasn't really listening, she just wanted to see her son.

When Ethan appeared a few minutes later the doctor finally walked in, and then ushered them into a separate and private room. "What's going on? Where's Conner? I want to see my son!" she demanded as he closed the door and turned to them. "As soon as I can, I promise you Mrs. Lane, I'll take you to your son. But first, please have a seat, there's a few things we need to discuss. First of all, my name is Dr. Bryant, and I'll be the one taking care of Conner from now on," the doctor said as he settled into the chair on the other side of his desk. "Now I've already contacted his primary care physician, Dr. Cole, and his secretary is faxing us Conner's records as we speak. Before we go any further, however, let me assure that right now your son is fine. We have him stabilized and we gave him a small amount of sedative to let him rest. So right now he's sleeping comfortably."

"But what happened, Doc? They told us he collapsed on the playground. Just collapsed!" Ethan's voice was strained with worry. The doctor sighed. He hated having to give bad news. Leaning across the desk, he softened his tone and looked them both in the eye. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this...but according to the CAT scans we took it appears that Conner has a small mass on the top of his spinal cord. We believe that this is what caused his collapse. A mass the size of his can exert enough pressure on the nerves on and around the spinal cord to cause temporary paralysis."

"Wait, just wait!" First you tell us Conner has a tumor, and now you're saying he's paralyzed!" Ethan's voice rose as Abby sat shocked at what they had been told. "No, Mr. Lane, the paralysis was only temporary, it's gone for right now." "For right now? So what does this mean, it'll come back!?" Ethan demanded. Abby let out a small gasp.

"Unfortunately, Mrs. Lane, a condition like his often has no symptoms until it grows to a certain size. Unless for some other reason, like a head injury, Conner was supposed to be x-rayed, this is by no means your pediatrician's fault. There's really no way he could have known it to be there without a CAT scan or MRI."

For the next twenty minutes the couple sat and listened to the doctor describe the fate of their little boy. Later they sat beside Conner's bed for hours, holding his hand and watching television with him. Doing anything they could to distract him and trying to stay upbeat so as not to scare him any more than he already was. When Abby's parents arrived they brought coloring books and toys for Conner. So while Ethan entertained him, Abby took her parents out into the hall and told them everything.

They took it pretty much as she expected. Her father was the one to put his big safe arms

around Abby and her teary-eyed mother, and tell them it was going to be alright. Her father had always been the strong one.

Later that night after Abby's parents had left and Conner was asleep, the young couple sat exhausted in one of the green hospital chairs. Heads together, with her on his lap, they sat silent, until Ethan finally whispered, "It's gonna be okay, baby, they're going to take care of him. We'll get through this, it's gonna be fine." Shutting her eyes with her head on his shoulder, she could only hope that he was right. A few minutes later they were both asleep.

The next afternoon they stood with the doctor in the hallway outside of Conner's room. They held hands tightly as he explained what was really their only option, surgery. "In order to relieve the pressure, we're going to have to remove the mass," he said as he watched them carefully. Abby looked at Ethan and then at him, "But isn't that risky? I mean, I've heard that surgery near your spinal cord can be really dangerous."
"Unfortunately, yes, I'm not going to deceive you, it is a tricky procedure. However, in Conner's case the tumor is positioned where it should detach relatively easily. And...Mr. and Mrs.

Lane...without removing the tumor, there is a seventy-five percent chance that within the next year it will cause full paralysis from the neck down." The doctor paused for a moment and then said, "I'm sorry."

The two of them held a silent conversation with their eyes. When Abby turned to him he could tell by her expression that they'd decided to go along with the operation. She took a deep breath and looked him straight in the eye, "Will you take good care of my little boy?" "Absolutely," he replied firmly. "Then let's do it."

Two days later they stood in the hallway and watched Conner being wheeled away to surgery. They had spent the morning playing with him and talking to him about what was going to happen. Abby had told him that, "he was going to go to sleep for a while, and that the doctor was going to make him all better." When Conner said he was scared it would hurt, Ethan assured him that he would sleep through everything and that when he woke up, "Mommy and Daddy would be right beside him." After talking for a while he seemed to accept it, and he even asked if when he woke up from his "nap" he could have the ice cream Grandpa had promised him. They had laughed and Abby told him, "Of course, honey, as soon as the doctor says it's okay." And with that he was satisfied. But Abby had to fight down tears as she watched the swinging doors close around him and his entourage of doctors and nurses. Ethan held her for a moment, and they both drew strength from each other. Then he took her hand, and led her to the waiting room where all their friends and family were gathered, offering their love and support.

Three hours later the waiting room was filled with empty soda cans and discarded candy bar wrappers, and the family was clumped in little groups around the room, everyone talking in low tones and glancing towards the door every few minutes. Abby sat on the couch next to her mother watching Ethan pace the floor. "Dammit, what's taking so long!" he growled, striding past the coke machine and then turning back. "It's been more than three hours and they said it

wouldn't take longer than two!" Abby's father stood up from his chair, and putting an arm around Ethan, he led him over to the other side of the room and attempted to calm him down. Watching her father and husband, Abby couldn't help but wonder, why? Why was this family always hurting and waiting, praying for things to turn out okay? When Abby's sister and brother-in-law had died she had thought that it was the worst possible thing that could happen, but now that she faced losing their little boy, the one who was now her son, she knew that no matter how bad things were, they could always get worse. Suddenly she sat up straight on the couch. A new thought had just occurred to her. How were they going to pay for these hospital bills? The doctor hadn't mentioned any costs, and they had been far too worried to ask. She bit her lip. She knew that Ethan's construction job only gave him and their family partial benefits, and with the way the crops had been this year there wasn't much extra money to go around. What would they do? Well, she thought, we'll just mortgage the house again. We'll borrow against the bank, we'll do whatever it takes. Things will be okay, she told herself silently, they just will be.

Abby was jolted back from her thoughts when she realized that the entire room had suddenly gone quiet. She looked up. Everyone was frozen, looking towards the door. Through the small plate glass window Abby saw the figure of the doctor approaching. For a moment ice ran through her veins, and then she whispered, "Ethan." He was by her side in an instant, crossing the room it seemed without even touching the floor. They held each other and rose as one when the doctor entered the room. Time seemed to stop. And then the doctor smiled. Abby's knees went weak, and she started to cry tears of joy and relief as Dr. Bryant began to speak. "It went well," he said, as he took off his surgical cap and gown, "Although it took a little bit longer than we expected, we got it all. Every tiny piece of his tumor is gone, and right now he's resting in recovery. In about," the doctor glanced at his watch, "twenty minutes I'll have one of the nurses take you back to see him. By then the anesthesia will be starting to wear off. We'll let him wake up for a little bit, long enough for the three of you to see each other, but then I'll have to give him another sedative. Right now what he needs is rest, but by that time he'll be in his own room and the two of you can stay with him if you like."

The doctor has barely finished speaking when Abby broke away from Ethan and gave him a big hug. Holding him tightly she whispered her thanks, he had saved her little boy. Right now that was the only thing that mattered. Not the bills, or the crops, or the farm. The only thing that mattered was Conner, and Conner was going to be okay.





– For Andrey Lendick-Van Zweden-

(1914-2003)

In this solemn time of sorrow,
We all have certain memories that remind us
Of your stay among us as you traversed this earth:
How you enjoyed crafting,

And filling us with delicious food;
How you hung your picture plates with care,
And knew which decorative touches were just right;
How you served in the Christian San for so many years,
And touched so many hearts with your two hands,

As well as with your gracious smile;
How you loved your pink carnations,
And always knew how to arrange them best;

How you liked to watch the birds that came to the feeder, And took the time to mention the fall foliage, So that we would pause in our mad rushing, And look around us as we had our baakle.

You had so many simple gifts;
You taught us so many things.
And as we look back with rose tinted glasses
On some of your traits which we never took the time to appreciate,
We remember that we all falter;
Yet, we love you still-

And that love can never die.
For although we miss your earthly presence among us,
We cannot begrudge the Creator your voice,
Which has joined the chorus that sings His praises.

Ah, but how do we let you go? We never said good-bye Before you fell asleep... And peacefully slipped away, On a beautiful Sabbath morn, To the One Who spoke to your soul As you waited patiently in your wheelchair For Him to take you home, And free you from your tired body. The silver cord has been loosed. The golden bowl has been broken, By the Potter's loving hand. We wait for faith and family, Trust and time. To begin to heal our hearts. We ask that God's grace Would comfort those left behind.

For 'tis of His mercy,
And that alone,
That He allows us to keep your memory alive.
We believe that your body merely slumbers,
While your soul lives in the land above,
And the semblance of your spirit remains with us.

In the time left us,
We shall with renewed fervor,
Storm Heaven's gate
That we might spend eternity with you in God's glory.
And on the great Day of Days,
When you arise
To enter the Holy City,
Remember us,
As we remember you.

-Janelle A. Van Zweden-

## Light of Inspiration Holly Lata

Inside the appearance of this mundane soul Is a warrior of integrity, a kind sir. Tenacious and assiduous is this man To fulfill his duties and goals. His strength is seen through his diligent work. Strong, also, is his will to help others rather than himself. Selfless acts surround his merciful spirit. Nature is seen in his intrepid heart, He wants nothing to do with man's destruction of God's earth. Disdain he has for deleterious drugs. Though, he is not the leader of discipline. More so, a child of benevolence. A tactful man is he, who will not scrutinize. He would rather listen and learn from you. Laughter lies in his long-lasting life, He brightens my day with every smile. He gives me hope and courage. There is no better word than Hero to explain my father. I follow his thoughts and beliefs, For I understand him better than anyone else. He is, and always will remain, my Light of Inspiration.

Photo by . Morica

#### Chris Ochadlick

## "Where Has the Time Gone?"

In a few short months my daughter will be ten years old. As I watch her play, the sad and often spoken litany of all parents echoes through my mind, "Where has the time gone?" Wasn't it only yesterday I brought her home from the hospital? It was yesterday, almost ten years' worth of yesterdays.

In those ten years, as I've watched her grow physically, mentally and emotionally, I have felt her subtle, yet powerful influence on my own life. If nothing else, she has taught me the fine art and virtue of patience, a trait I sorely lacked prior to her arrival. She is also responsible, in part, for the fulfillment of a lifelong dream of becoming a writer. She is a constant joy and her presence in my life is impossible to describe. What she has given to me cannot be expressed in mere words.

I have found it to be true that one sees life differently through a child's eyes. You relive some of those times you forgot, as a child and somewhere, deep inside, you instinctively know that you reacted in much the same way as your child does now. I remember thinking, after bringing her home from the hospital that the 2 a.m. feedings and the "crying hour" would never end. Looking back, I'm hard pressed to remember either. Somewhere along the way I blinked and here I am almost 10 years later.

Like all children, she is unique, and apart from many children, she is an only child. Already I see heads shaking in sadness and hear many of you saying, "She should have a brother or sister." Unfortunately, we all think we know what's good for other people so before you hastily pass judgment read on.

To many, the phrase "only child" goes hand in hand with being spoiled; many years ago but not today. In retrospect, I've known families with several siblings where one or more are spoiled. So stereotyping "only" children as spoiled is an invalid assumption.

I have made it a point not to spoil her nor allow anyone else to spoil her. I think "only" children have it tougher than families with several children because the parents only have one chance to do it right. There will be no further experiments to test other theories at a later date; this is it.

My daughter has asked on several occasions why she does not have a brother or sister. Her father and I have done our best to explain why and she has accepted our explanation with grace and wisdom far exceeding her years.

Raising a child or children is not an easy job and I've begun to explain to my daughter that being a parent is one of the most difficult jobs anyone can undertake. What I have found myself doing is using the following analogy. I explain that whenever we purchase a major appliance, be it a TV, VCR, computer, etc. it always comes with an owner's manual. No such manual accompanies a newborn baby. And yet, the most important occurrence in the lifecycle, the

birth of a child, should be accompanied with an owner's manual, or at least some sort of general guide. (I explained this analogy to a friend who made an astute observation by saying that the manual would be so large, it would be impossible to comprehend).

At the moment, my daughter stands at the threshold of adolescence. It's a threshold I do not want her to cross, not just yet. But then, I think, when would be a good time? Never I say. But time marches inexplicably on and children grow up. I sense in her now a pulling away from me. A pulling away that is a normal part of life but it doesn't make me feel any better or happier. I know this is how things must be. The next decade will pass by even faster and before I know it she will be 20 and again I will hear myself say, "Where has all the time gone?"

I have two wishes for my daughter. First, that she lives a long, healthy and happy life and second, she never has to take care of me or her father in our old age. It is not fair to saddle the young with the old. She did not ask to be put on this earth, her father and I chose to have her and as such, her only debt to us is to live, with God's help, a long, healthy and happy life. If she achieves this, then we will consider our job as parents well done.

Kalil Gibran, philosopher and author of "The Prophet," could not have put it more eloquently when he wrote:

"Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

for they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but not seek to make them like you.

For life does not go backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as

living arrows are sent forth..."

Lauren has taught me a great deal and through her I've learned we must cherish our children and covet the time we spend with them because, all too soon, we will hear ourselves say, "Where Has the Time Gone?"

## To Feel the Real

Lam a warung spirit Net yet as apparities Het yet a spirit Just a human with threads pulling My maides try to burst Threugh the seams Langalmost net me A shadere of my former 16-year-old visien Eperson that I was Fer a men five minutes Licas ricier happy with The me in the mirror Get who is At the end of the day My sent is old And a list of metaphers 4My past lives play Like a silent meva In my cycs I dream at night Of the person I was But fergetting every meaning Like semeene is trying To tell me uet to relish the past La ender if other people wish Fer the serven in their lives To lives their days To feel the real.

All of Cls

I would leve to live without a case in the world where mency is plentiful and people are just and wise where families case so matter what happens and we realize that all of us are human.

Peems by JTR



### DUSTY WINDOWS

THE ATTICS TREASURE,
BEYOND DUSTY WINDOWS LAY,
FADED MEMORIES OF YESTERDAY,
CLEVER FORESHADOWING OF
WHAT IN THE FUTURE LAY.
A CONNECTION WITH THE PAST,
THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT WAY.
WILL THE PICTURES OF YOU AND I,
IN THESE BOXES SOMEDAY LIE,
FOR THE YOUTH OF FUTURE YEARS,
TO COME ACROSS WITH JOY AND TEARS?

"JESSICA SNYDER"

## Michelle Neumann

#### Smoke on the Water

The scent of you is blissfully intoxicating
Every time I breathe you in
My body, mind, and heart come alive

Your eyes are like liquid fire Every time I am held there The fire envelops me

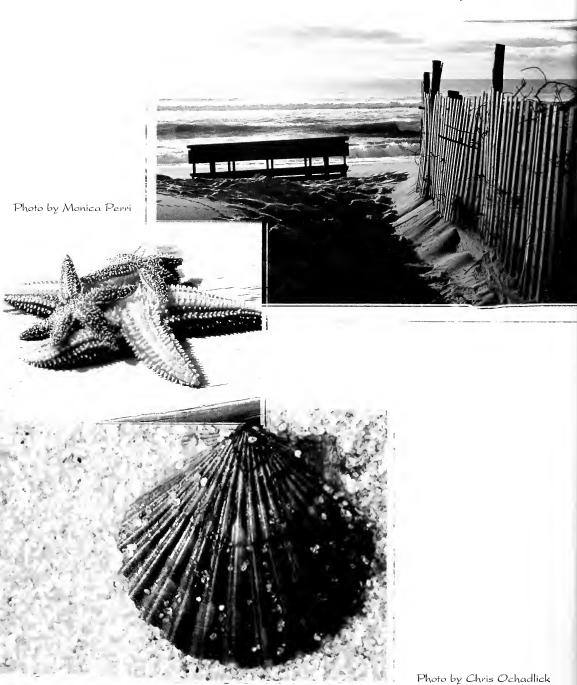
Your touch is like the first winter's chill Invigorating and filled with anticipation My core is thrilled beyond perception

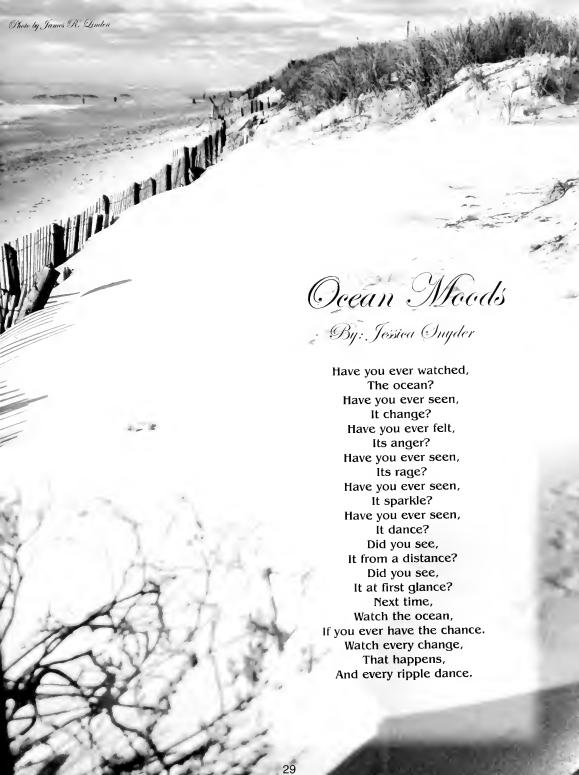
With lips so soft, gentle and inviting You beckon me in to your supple world An utterly irresistible temptation draws me nearer

With heart-racing magnetism we meet The fire, the thrill, the new world...

Eyes closed to see the full experience Your hands lightly stroke my neck, back, and sides Our lips apart, moving so fluidly and gently

The world fades into the mist when I'm with you If I wanted to, I could soar amongst the clouds All my troubles and woes float away as smoke on the water





#### CHRIS OCHADLICK

#### SPORT UTILITY DISHWASHERS

Decorating magazines like "House Beautiful," "Country Living," and "Mary Englebreit's Home Companion" fascinate me. In every issue I wander vicariously through beautiful four color page spreads of picture perfect homes. Homes I would love to live in but not necessarily love to clean. These very same magazines also showcase new tools, gadgets, and appliances.

KitchenAid® recently launched a new design concept in dishwashers that allows customers to select their own color, interior feature package, door style and console. Using their concept, I think I've designed the ultimate in dishwashers called SUDs.

SUDS are Sport Utility Dishwashers. Yes, you've read correctly, Sport Utility Dishwashers. Using SUV manufacturers' marketing mantras of building bigger and more powerful, why not dishwashers' employing the very same design features as those gas-guzzling behemoths?

Not for the faint of heart or light of wallet, only the finest components manufactured by the best companies will be used. Top of the list is a Bose Acoustic Wave® Music System which enables customers to partake of the full dish washing experience. Upgrading to an MP3 player allows customers to download alternate dishwasher wave files or wash tones. Standard on the SUD is a CD-RW that allows you to burn the sudsy sounds to CD.

Powering this top of the line dishwasher is a 6.0L Power Stroke V8 Turbo Diesel with 33 wash cycles per gallon for city kitchen installations and 62 wash cycles per gallon for country kitchen installations. With a warp speed power wash cycle like those found in most car washes, stubborn food stains are pummeled into their molecular components and compacted into neat little pellets for gardening fanatics. While this dishwasher obviously is not Energy Star Compliant it is environmentally friendly.

With 640 custom front panel options, consumers' choices are limited only by their imagination. I'm placing an order for two panels. The first is a red Ferrari with camel color leather interior. This allows me to have the car without shelling out the cash for the real thing. Why a red Ferrari? I love fast cars and I keep seeing the image of a blind Al Pacino, in the movie, "Scent of a Woman," driving recklessly through the streets of New York at 120 mph. With this panel it becomes the only dishwasher on the market with the ability to wash dishes as fast as you can

drive. My second choice will be the front end of an H2 Hummer. I can't decide whether to get the Sunset Orange Metallic or the Sage Green Metallic (by the way, actual Hummer colors) for those days when I'm in a "go ahead and make my day" dishwashing mood.

Not up to designing your own SUD? Then try a Designer SUD. For bachelors, there's the Tommy Hilfiger model with its ubiquitous patriotic theme. Got a sports enthusiast in the family? Try the special edition L.L. Bean model, which cleverly disguises the control console in the handlebars of a rugged 10-speed titanium frame mountain bike. For gourmet fanatics, the Emeril Lagasse model yells, "BAM!" when the dishwashing cycle is complete.

Can't get your husband interested in helping with the dishes? A nuclear powered remote control, impossible to lose or destroy, will definitely get his attention. From anywhere, within a 25-mile radius, men can operate the SUD with the touch of a button enabling them to lock and load dishes and program one of 18 cycles on the fly. This state of the art remote control also doubles as a garage door opener, a global positioning system, a vision enabled PCS phone, and simultaneously programs your VCR and DVD.

I predict domestic engineers, formerly known as housewives, will proclaim SUDs the next best thing to the ever-popular Grab It® and Swiffer® floor cleaning systems. Not one to rest on my laurels, you are no doubt wondering about my next appliance makeover. I've decided to call them SOBs but you can call them Sport Optional Blenders.







They say that trees are wise Standing there since times of past But how with all these memories Can they stand to last?

Memories of younger years
When time apparently stood still
And friends around would set the mood
Thus, one had no need to move

But forces stronger than any could feel
Would drift their way soon
Swaying branches with unbearable pain
Until a chill ran to the root

The agony flourished out And led to final good-byes Tears ran down their barren faces Until at last they closed their eyes

Seasons soon again would change As fiendish forces blew by And she watched in numbing pain Helpless to help him, guarded in frozen chains

> Soon white would cover all that was Until shivering in a field alone Stood one lost tree weeping in pain Completely chilled through the bone

And so they say that trees are wise Standing and seeing since ancient times But how with all these memories Can they stand to last?

But how with all these memories

Can they stand

Stand to last?

#### HELP, NO HELP NEEDED

Without any effort on my part, I became

Without any choice on my part,
I became a male

With some struggle I became a man.

With some privilege I became a husband

With great pleasure I became a father

With some perseverance I earned a living.

> With some conflicts I became a Dad

With some regrets I'm turning gray.

With great remorse and helplessness One day I'll lay it all away.

-Dr. Richard C. Ziemer

# Growing with Mi Amore'

Although unsure initially,
I denied my feelings because we were friends
I questioned destiny, "Can we become more?" "Will we be more?"
I smile to the thought of you
You understand my chaos, my life, my being
No one keeps my attention as like yourself

Captured by your love, I do not want to be freed Not infatuation, no temptation, no fauxation Completion began to become continuous I want to whisper in your ear those three words I know you feel the same way Never go astray

This feeling is overwhelming
Love has possession of my emotions
You are my conversation, my thoughts
Confusion is erased, it is clear to me
The way you make me feel reflects the truth

The thought of you causes me to daydream
The vision of your presence puts my mind at ease
Constant smiles, endless trembles
The closer I get to you the more I feel the reality of no mishap, no discomfort
Join me in a celebration of new found love
Time flies when I am with you, I do not want it to end

I can't hold my tongue any longer
It's been awhile but I still get anxious, get butterflies, get worried
Jealousy can become an annoyance
I've learned to overcome that battle and seize the moment
I just want to bring it to the surface
I see myself with you
I hope the feeling is mutual, time will tell
Amore' Mi Amore' Mi Amore'

-Nicolle Blackmon-

# By the Light of the Moon

### Níkkí Sherman

A cloak of serenity fell across the long plateau as an azure night slowly diffused the lingering remnants of sunlight over the distant horizon. A hesitant aurora began to flicker far above the waves of grass, fighting to defeat the blazing sunbeams that had kept its gleaming song hidden for what seemed like an eternity. Just as this premier star flashed its full brilliance to the universe, an abrupt explosion of jewels pierced through the hazy pillow in the sky, glittering with the giddy knowledge that they beheld thousands of secrets, treasures that not a soul would ever discover.

The sea of carefully trimmed grass suddenly trembled without warning as the wind began to blow. A swirl of leaves and uprooted cattails flew across the yard in wild circles, rolling past shrubbery and spinning hastily around tree trunks. Finally the breeze slid to a halt as it reached an ornate archway that served as the entrance to a large building and dissipated into the abruptly serene air.

The placid tranquility concluded upon passing through the archway. Sonorous clanging as glass clattered against marble tables, loud shouts exploded from the windpipes of rowdy bartenders, and raucous shrieks from the instruments of a string quartet intertwined together to create a deafening roar within the restaurant.

A drunken man staggered across the room, swaying and zig-zagging helplessly in a thunderbolt pattern. When he finally reached his destination, he struggled momentarily to fully grasp the doorknob in his hand, then pulled the wooden plank back as if its weight was twice that of his own. Eventually he stumbled outside into the starry night. Subsequently a small form slipped past the drunkard into the restaurant, bypassing the maitre'd to limp slowly toward the bar.

On the far side of the room, a tall man clad in a white button-down shirt and black slacks glanced at himself in the mirror hanging from the wall. He narrowed his eyes before adjusting the small bow tie strapped around his neck, while simultaneously pouring varying amounts of liquor into a glass. He turned on his heel to slide the glass across the marble counter, unaware of the liquid sloshing precariously close to creating a mess. "There ya go. One Rusty Nail."

The man opposite him grabbed the drink eagerly, pressing it to his lips with a gasp and swigging it down in two gulps. He let out a sigh of anguish, then slapped the counter harshly with a fist. "Thanks s'much. I needed that," he said brokenly, shoving the glass toward the bartender.

"You want another?"

He shook his head, dropping his head down to stare at his lap. "But a Jack Daniels would be mighty fine."

A moment later a new glass clinked against the marble in front of him. "You wanna talk about íť?"

Raising his eyes to gaze upon the bartender's friendly face, he sighed. "Woman troubles. You know how it goes...

"Very understandable. Hold up a minute; let me grab a stool and we'll talk."

Just as the bartender rejoined the distressed man, a parched voice spoke. "Do either of you young men mind if I take a seat here?" Both men turned toward the voice and were surprised at the spectacle before them. A tall woman - well, she would have been tall had her stance not been bent at the midpoint of her spine - - stood before them, precariously close to losing her balance. She was clothed in a long, cotton dress that covered her entire body to the floor. Snow-white hair was swooped back into a soft bun at the nape of her neck, revealing tanned skin that was weathered with wrinkles. An arm was held high in the air, with one finger pointed toward a stool.

The bartender exchanged a glance with his acquaintance, then shrugged. "If you don't mind

listening to this man's troubles, then feel free."

The woman nodded and cautiously positioned herself onto the stool, then gazed straight into the face of the man behind the counter. He returned a blank stare, causing her eyes to roll. "In this position, I believe that it would be most polite to request my order."

He started at her flippant statement, then chuckled nervously. "Excuse me. It's just that you don't" - Placing her lower arm flat onto the counter surface, she lifted her shoulders passively. "You know, some things aren't always the way they seem." An enchanting song trickled from her lips when the bartender remained stunned. She leaned over the counter. "I'll have a Sloe Gin Fizz." He immediately spun around to fulfill her request, all the while shaking his head.

She turned to face the man beside her. "Now, how about you share your troubles? Perhaps your

insecurity with imparting this information will prove inequitable; there may be a chance this old woman could enlighten you with a solution."

"I don't know..." He sighed softly, letting his breath whistle across his glass, which caused circu-

lar ripples to tremble across the liquid.

The bartender placed a drink in front of the woman and sat down on his stool. "Why don't you give

She shook her head and waved a hand lightly through the air. "Never mind that."

"All right, why don't you give ma'am a chance?" He motioned around the half-empty room.

"Besides, the midnight crowd won't arrive for another hour or so."

With an intake of breath, the man tilted his head downward to stare at the frosty glass. He ran his thumb along the side, watching as it left behind a clear trail. At the moment he was terribly lost in a storm of confusion and distress; however, maybe the elderly woman was correct. Perhaps by some extraordinary miracle, she could pave a path out of the foggy disaster.

"Okay... You see, it's my wife. Her father passed away two years ago and she is still stricken with grief - to the point where she thinks of nothing else. We constantly argue, usually about the most inane affairs. Tonight she threw me out, and I fear that this time there won't be forgiveness within her heart." He shook his head slowly, then bent down to let his gaze rest on the coal-black counter.

"That's all?"

Ms. - -?"

His head whipped toward the old woman at her sharp statement. "All - -ALL?! What - -"

She lifted a finger softly to her lips, immediately quieting the raging cyclone that was beginning to whirl within the man's body. She leaned back with a tilt of her head to observe the decrepit skeleton that was left before her. It was a carcass of a human, a man who had hurled all of his hope into hell, and did not have even a sacred vow left to live for.

"Shh. I would like to recount a story for

As she crossed her legs, the man scowled

in disgust. "A story? How the hell is that supposed to help me gain back the trust of my wife?" He rubbed his hands against his temples. "What the hell am I doing? I'm arguing with an old woman wh-"

"I used to live here."

Both men stared at the woman in bewilderment. "Are you daft?" the bartender asked slowly.

"What the hell does that have to do with my life?"

"This restaurant here," the woman waved her arms through the air, motioning around the room at the red and white wood, "this barn, this entire farm - - it used to be my home." A laugh slipped from her lips at the gasps that escaped their throats. "Now that I have captured your attention, would you care to hear my story? Perhaps you may learn something from it, with my being such a wise woman."

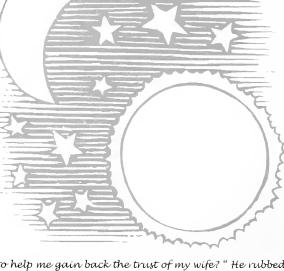
"How is it possible that you lived at Normandy Farm? It was to my belief that all the old inhabi-

tants were - pardon me\_ dead," the bartender said with widened eyes.

She shrugged nonchalantly. "Now, are you interested in hearing of the events that led to it becoming the largest farm in Pennsylvania?"

The men turned to face one another submissively. "Sure, why not."

A mysterious haze abruptly swirled around the old woman as she adjusted her position so that she could gaze out a large window near the bar. The diamond crescent moon soaring in the night sky was just barely visible over the silhouette of the tallest branches of a tree. Suddenly her lips lifted toward the stars in a brilliant flash of joy, and her cracked eyelids rose, revealing a pair of sparkling green orbs crystallized with remarkable, vivacious youth. Then, with a dazzlingly clear voice, she began to tell her story...



## -Dr. Karen Schramm-Soft White Rain

The skies are white-on-white with snow.

And the evergreens show green no more,
The temperature is ten below,

And snow lies where I had shoveled before.

Those downy soft flakes are falling still.
To blanket the already long-whitened ground.
And snow has hidden the windowsill.
And the roof with white is heavily crowned.

The criss-crossing tracks of hungry birds
Are swiftly by falling snow concealed.
But bright eager "Thank yous" are soon to be heard
When all the bird-feeders are freshly refilled.

Some there are who detest the snow—
Their cars won't start, and they're cold, they complain—
But what sets my face all aglow
Is when the weatherman predicts more soft white rain!



Photo by Malinda Swartwout



Photo by Renée McManus

### Janelle A. Van Zweden

# Muted Renderings... For Jack Aranson

You are older now,
I never knew you young;
But your face still retains
The visage of the Shakespearean actor you once were.

I hear your voice repeating the poetry of old, The lines which large audiences once heard, The words that can still set fire To the few to whom you now speak.

I remember your glory that I never knew,
That of which I have heard,
But never witnessed.
I see its mark in the distinguished lines of your face,
In the purposeful movements of your hands,
In the smoldering intensity of your eyes.

As the years pass,
And your hands shake,
While your feet shuffle,
And your voice betrays you,
Your eyes have grown somewhat dimmer,
Yet they are never too blurred to reflect
The image of your strength,
Such as a spoon
Reflects but a vague rendering of a brilliant likeness.

Though a mirror shows
Only a shrunken figure,
I can still see your soul
In the depths of your kind eyes.
Your merriment,
Delivered in the perfect voice of Shakespeare,
Can yet ring delight from the
Hearts of those blessed enough to surround you.

I have seen you in the gloom of Dickens' London— Your scarf on an ice skater, Your coat on a lamplighter, Your galoshes on a mail carrier, Your hat on a fisherman— As the muted stones and dark river Looked on without distinguishable commentary.

I know that—
Shrouded within that overcoat,
That plaid scarf,
Those galoshes,
And that fisherman's cap—
Your passion still exists
As strongly as ever it has.
Yet, a wise soul gains depth as it ages
Accumulating love and loss, and ultimately, life.

So you have taken in words And harbored them in your inner core, Only to impart replicas out to others In ever changing patterns; Never losing, but gaining as you gave; Giving as once you were given.

But one thing must not be lost,
Buried beneath the shrines of Melville and Thomas,
Eliot, and so many others,
It is a treasure which must not be forgotten,
As often I have done,
(For my soul, too, cleaves to those of the poets of old),
And that is the salvation which all men must have,
For, having, it is that alone which can never be lost.

Ahoy, Mate, and Godspeed— Keep your eye on the flaming Beacon, As your feet tread the Pequod's deck. Background: While a 4-H Club member and president of the Woodside 4-H Club, J truly enjoyed riding my bicycle visiting members to look at their 4-H projects and help them update their project books. Don't ask me why J liked doing this task, but J did and little did J know at the time that this act was an important clue for identifying my passion for teaching. Even though J disliked going to school, my father and mother were determined J would graduate from high school. J was never permitted to miss a day of school except for the first day of deer hunting season. At my father's encouragement after graduating from high school in 1956, J attended West Virginia University for one year. There J discovered that J wasn't as dumb as J perceived myself to be and decided to continue my college education. J wanted to attend a smaller college and transferred to Delaware Valley College in 1957. After graduating from DVC, J had an opportunity to teach at DVC for one semester. This opportunity enabled me to explore teaching and it became my profession and passion, it enshrined my life's work. J devoted 43 years of my career in educational endeavors that went far beyond my wildest expectations. The following words are an attempt to express inner feelings about the teaching profession as J experienced it, plus earning a doctorate in 1981.

### Teachers that Teach

Teachers enshrine their lives with a passion for teaching, with devotion beyond description that inculcates the art of grasping and reaching, Helping people to grasp knowledge to reach within their inner selves, Results in humans to reveal mandates of their innate delve.

Teachers relish people regardless of their denominations,
And thrive amid groupings having diversified affiliations.
A teacher's heart is saturated with benevolent feelings of ambition to help others,
While possessing virtues of patience, persistence and perseverance akin to mothers.

Teachers are never too grizzled to listen to a child's dream, And all the reverie passions they may seem. Masterful teachers protect with painstaking care the unfolding mind, And nurture it with character and sincerity for it to be kind.

Teachers relish the latitude to be creative,

And prefer not to be fenced with rules too definitive.

Causing students to envision concepts, ideas and critical thinking,

Postulates autonomy beyond policy tinkering.

Teachers bequeath a legacy of their persona upon youngster's progress,

As surely as children learn to dress.

Teachers' clothes, personal habits, sayings, mannerisms, and friends,

All influence "watching" children during their evolving trends.

Teachers enlighten the minds of young people as a future generation,
By teaching life skills with betterment intention.
Youth last for support, encouragement, and inspiration that altruistic teachers give,
For it goads them to evolve into gainful citizens who cheerfully work and play as a way to live.

Dr. James F. Diamond

Our Long Journey

On the walk from the parking lot
to New Dorp Beach
anticipation grew and grew
With fishing supplies in hand
this long journey to the fishing spot began
Through a minute opening in some towering trees

Up a little incline and still a ways to go

The scent of the ocean grew stronger
An abandoned, burned hotel was passed
Prickly grass stuck to shoes and socks
The never-ending horizon became visible
The crashing of the waves became audible
The vast beach became noticeable

Down a little incline and almost there

Through the sand that glistened like diamonds
with spiny horseshoe crabs
sometimes by the sandy shoreline
The soft ocean breeze all around
Fishing supplies—bait, fishing poles, coolers, spare hooks—set up between two piers

After such a long excursion the fishing would finally start!

Annemarie Rissi

## FROZEN

Cold, so cold, cold as ice
Frozen inside this chamber of snow
The frigid air bites at my skin
The crisp wind tears at my face
Ages of tears are preserved forever
Held fast to my face and body
Forever burning is my suffering
Forever stabbing is my pain
Lying here cold and bared
I freeze for all eternity

-Michelle Neumann-

### Kate Sollenberger

## Frosted Memories

It was mid-afternoon on this overcast March afternoon when she pulled into the driveway. After stepping out of her cherry red Dodge Ram, she took a deep breath as she looked at the sight before her. The building, that was once so familiar to her, looked as if it too had suffered the same tumultuous events, just as she had. The once upscale two-story rancher had definitely seen better days. The paint, which was originally the color of a bright blue sky, showed signs of age. Chipping and peeling, the paint had been weathered, no longer vibrant, but pale and blue gray in color. Shingles stuck out from the roof like a youngster's wild teeth, gnarled and awkward. As she gazed at the frosty windows, she thought back to the last time she had been here.

Eight years ago, she peered out of the rearview window of her family's station wagon as they pulled away for the last time. She insisted on gazing longingly with her nose pressed to the window until home was just a distant speck on the horizon. For so many years she wondered what had happened to this place that had once offered her comfort.

Finally old enough to drive, the inquisitive youth decided to take matters into her own hands, and travel back to her childhood residence in order to put her mind at ease. Often wondering what had happened to her beloved home and what it would feel like to return there, she set out to discover the truth about her past.

Her long, silky, blonde hair was being tousled around in the icy wind as she made her way across the front lawn. Her sneakers made a crunching noise as she crossed the frosted grass, leaving ugly footprints in the frozen dew as she walked. The wind nipped at her ears and nose, causing them to burn slightly from the cold. As she stepped onto the porch, she drew her parka tighter around her lean body. Icy rings formed around the bottom of her jeans, causing them to move like a bell, using her thin legs as the pendulum. The echo of her footsteps on the wooden porch resounded as she ventured towards the front door.

Hands shaking, the timid young woman cautiously turned the door knob. Half startled, she jumped back, when to her amazement, the door opened; she was surprised that the door had actually been left unlocked. After she regained her composure, she stepped cautiously into her former dwelling.

The heavy door slammed shut behind her as she stood in the frigid foyer. She surveyed the damage that years of neglect had done to her childhood home. Cobwebs, leaves, and dust had turned her cozy house into a place of uncertainty and chaos. Draped with years of dust, the disheveled furniture made a once comforting place an eerie scene. Old family portraits still hung on the walls, serving as a reminder of what used to be. Walking down the empty hallway, her footsteps echoed throughout the house as she made her way towards her bedroom.

Slowly she peered into her old room. Instantly she felt the familiar comfort that had been present when she was eight years old. Her bed was still unkempt from her hurried departure as she rushed to pack a few belongings and leave for good. The girl glanced around looking at posters, stuffed animals, and old trinkets sitting around her room. A pile of children's clothes lay crumpled on the floor. Figurines and Barbie dolls lay strewn across the blue carpet from a time long ago. After basking in her moment of reminiscence, she turned around to cross the hallway. As she spun around she stopped...frozen in her tracks.

She could not move. She stood facing the bedroom of her dearest friend and older brother. Posters of Metallica and Led Zeppelin were plastered to the door, making it look like a piece of art, a collage. As a young girl, she used to stare at this disheveled mess of pictures for hours. It was the unwritten rule that little sisters were never ever allowed to venture into their older brothers' rooms. So on the rare occasion that she was allowed in, she never paid much attention to the layout of his room.

At this time, since she was alone in the house, her house, there was no one stopping her from opening that door and discovering what lay beyond that alluring collage. Curiosity got the best of her. Hesitant to open the door, her knuckles turned white as she grasped the knob. It did not take much effort for the door to swing wide open. She gasped.

She could not believe her eyes. Like a miner who had just found gold, she stood there dumbstruck. Overcome with sadness and the harsh realization of who her brother really was, she just stood there looking into a whole new world, a world of pain and heartache. His room was tomb-like, scattered with memories. Nothing was out of place, not even his sheets. His beloved guitar stood regally in the corner, slightly dusty, but still in excellent condition. She remembered back to when she used to lie in her room as she listened to her best friend strum the beginnings of Stairway to Heaven on his sacred instrument through the doorway. Stacks of CDs lay piled neatly between his bed and his mahogany desk. The scent of his cologne lingered as she ambled around the room. She was captivated by the lost treasure this tomb withheld.

A framed photograph of her brother and a girl caught her attention while she was making her way around his room. The subjects of the photograph were both smiling, showing no care to the world around them. She noticed that the girl was very pretty with blond hair, hazel eyes, and a smile that could light up a whole room. She tried to remember a time when her brother was happy, but those moments were few and far between. During her tour of the lair, a shiny reflection from the far corner of the room caught her attention. She ventured over to see what alluring objects caught her eye.

To her horror she discovered razor blades, knives and rope hiding in one corner of the room. Burn marks and slashed walls lingered above this paraphernalia marking the satanic spot. Streaks of blood coated the walls from his futile attempt to mask his mental war. Things began to make sense. The harsh realization that her brother was not the same person he appeared to be on the outside struck her hard. Her head swooned with emotion. She never realized that her brother had so much pain and suffering to hide. A sickening feeling dropped into her stomach. In order to remedy her nauseous feeling, she had to sit down. Crumbling herself onto the bed, arms stretched out, nostrils taking in the tainted smells, she let herself remember.

It had been this exact day, March sixteenth, in the year 2000, in which her entire life would forever be altered. The day that her whole world came crashing down around her. The day that would haunt her dreams forever.

The memories came flooding back and she allowed them to consume her. It was just another typical Thursday for the lively fourth grader as she stepped off of the bus after a long day of school. After running down her gravel driveway she burst into the house with excitement. "lan, lan!" she called, "Where are you?" trying to find her older brother so that she could show him her spelling test that she had just aced. Her mother and father wouldn't return from work for another few hours or so, not that they would care anyway. After searching the usual places, the living room and the kitchen, the young girl raced down the hallway. Knocking furi-

ously on her brother's bedroom door, she got no response. She tried again and again but still no answer.

She sat down Indian style outside of his room worrying about where her brother might possibly be. Some possibilities such as a friend's house, school, or even the park crossed her mind, but Ian would never have allowed her to come home to an empty house. Since he was her older brother, a full seven years older in fact, he often took care of his younger sibling.

Picking herself up, she began to wander around the house checking her parents' room, the laundry room, and even their backyard. As she was walking back towards her bedroom, the basement door caught her eye. She thought to herself, "I don't know why he'd be down there, but I'd better check it out." Throwing the door open, she made her way down the steps and called out his name, "lan, lan" but there was no response.

She was just about to turn around and go upstairs when she saw him. He looked as if he was floating. It took her a moment to comprehend the situation at hand. Her brother was hanging from the ceiling. His face was ghastly white. She screamed. She ran to him, but being eight years old, her arms were only long enough to reach his knees. "lan!" she cried as she tried to yank him down, but it was too late. He was gone.

He was gone. She almost tripped over the chair that he had used to string himself up with. Running, stricken with fear, she made her way to the phone. Her trembling hands dialed 911.

Her memories after the phone call and the days to follow turned into a blur. Numbed by the shock of this horrifying discovery, the young girl went through the motions including the funeral and memorial services. She attended these events physically, but mentally she was somewhere else.

Sitting up, a wave of relief swept over the teen as she returned to the present. Confused thoughts, events, and memories began to make sense. A rational reason for her brother's suicide came into focus. For Amber, things had all of a sudden become crystal clear. Suddenly she felt very calm and relieved, almost like the burden that she had been carrying for years had been lifted from her shoulders. Taking one last glance around, she stood up and exited the room, closing the sacred door behind her. She thought about her life then and her life now as she slowly made her way back towards the outside world. She thought about how things would have turned out differently and about how her life could have been. As she closed the front door to the familiar house, she felt as if she was closing the unanswered chapter of her life.

Making her way back to her car, she noticed that her footprints from earlier were barely visible due to the new frost that had formed. She felt content as she observed this natural phenomenon. The frost had covered the blemishes she had made when she first arrived, causing the lawn to look mystical in the dusky red sun. She then realized that her life thus far had been like the footprints she had made, affecting the grass, making the lawn look ugly and scarred, but by giving it a little time, the picturesque portrait of beauty returned. This same healing had taken place in her heart as she confronted her past and the ghosts that had haunted her.

Letting out a sigh of relief, she glanced in her rear view mirror, just briefly, as she drove away from her childhood home for the last time.



## I Like Wine and Cheese!

My friend has repeated that she thinks you're too old To be the object of my affection; again I am told To look at other men, who are closer in age. That's her advice, and she thinks it quite sage. But \_\_ I reply\_\_ (And this is for you) Uou, dear Uuri, are like delicious red wine: You present a bouquet; that's old-fashioned and fine. You go to my head and you stay there all night. I cherish your body: you are my delight. Now, wine is bottled, and for years is not drunk Til it advances in age. Same with the chunk Of cheese that I nibble: It is aged, is it not? How can you quibble? The man that I love is older than I. And he's mellow and sweet, not old and dry. So say what you want, think what you please:

I happen to savor my wine and cheese!

### Janelle A. Van Zweden

## Life and Death in a Piano

-from the DVC Chapel-

The pianist sits,
Waiting silently,
Fingers poised over the ivory colored keys,
Body held in rigid readiness.

She waits,
Listening to the silence,
Feeling it press about her
As a hand that closes over a coin.

Her pinkie descends first And wonderful, glorious notes Tumble over each other in their glee, Cascading like a drunken waterfall.

The sounds banish the silence
To the far corners, the cracks, the crevices.
The silence lurks, unseen,
For the music to free it again.

The pianist plays on,
Fingers moving firmly,
Muscles rippling in her forearm
Brow furrowed in concentration.

The song rises and falls, Hurting, healing, loving, lying. Peace surrounds the song But eludes the lonely player.

Her eyes close for a second,
She draws in a cleansing breath of life,
And brings the song
To its final, solemn conclusion.

Yet another life has been lived, Yet another death has ensued.

### The Unicorn and the Little Itty Bitty Mouse

by Amanda Bohler

There was once a little itty bitty mouse, who lived in a not so little itty bitty house inside a produce stand next to the tracks where the big noisy train ran. One day, the little mouse noticed something odd outside his house. Something strange...could it be? Impossible! It was, it was a unicorn! What an amazing sight to behold! Dare he talk to him? Could he be so bold?

"Hullo!" said a voice outside.

"Wha-who?" declared the mouse, searching for a place to hide.

"Why, these tomatoes are simply lovely, I'll have one dozen to go, please," the voice replied.

"Well, you see," began the mouse, peering over the counter. Why, it's only Mrs. Basile, here to buy some tomatoes for her stew, the mouse thought to himself. He breathed a sigh of relief and perhaps, disappointment. (A unicorn would be, by far, much more entertaining than Mrs. Basile.) "Right away, ma'am," answered the mouse, as kindly as he knew how.

"Why thank you, little Evan," (for that was the little mouse's name) and she continued, ending with, "Good day!"

"Same to you. Are you going to the play?" the mouse said, inquisitively. Mrs. Basile stopped instantly, glanced slowly over her shoulder, and replied, "Going? I'm the star!"

"Why of course, now I recall," he recovered quickly, even for himself; he seemed to always have one or both of his feet in his mouth. He had prepared himself to make some other intelligent remark, hopefully to get Mrs. Basile to forget his forgetfulness, but by the time he came up with anything, she had gone. "Oh, well," he sighed, wondering if he could close down the produce stand early and go to the play.

The day continued in much the same fashion; Mr. Fisher came in to buy (as usual) two potatoes and one apricot. He always seemed so astonished at Evan's ability to remember the order, despite the uniqueness of the purchase. (Not to mention the fact that he bought it every Saturday.) Mrs. Henderson stopped by to pick up some carrots for her carrot cake – she was in charge of dessert after the play. The day would not have been complete without Mr. Donaldson stopping by to share his humor, as it was the highlight of the mouse's day. Many more customers passed by, and when he closed the stand that night, he felt a strange sadness somewhere in his heart. He had hoped that the unicorn was real. He wanted so badly to have someone to talk to. Perhaps he would get dressed up and go to the play. Suddenly, as if in response to his thoughts, he saw something out of the corner of his eye. It was! It was a unicorn! He was sure of it. He had never actually seen one, but he was sure that this was what they looked like. He would not let him get away this time! He would find his slippers and robe – it was cold outside – and he would walk over to the door and open and invite the unicorn in for some tea and crumpets. Yes, a splendid idea! He would go right now and...

"But I don't really like crumpets, although that is irrelevant because you don't have any," the unicorn declared, quite matter-of-factly from the window.

"Wha-how do you know?" cried the mouse, mostly embarrassed by this terrible social blunder – out of crumpets! What kind of host was he?

"Well, for one you were talking to yourself out loud. As for the absence of crumpets, I guessed. You don't seem like a crumpet kind of mouse. Perhaps Fig Newtons or Milano cookies would be better suited for you. But..." The unicorn continued in one long breath, while the mouse searched the cabinets, he was sure that aunt Lilly had given him some crumpets for Christmas last year. "But one can never tell these things from outside, especially when it is as cold as it is." The mouse was sure that the unicorn was hinting at something, but he had no time for trifles, perhaps there were some Milano cookies. "Oh, but I suppose I would have trouble fitting into such a small mouse house," the unicorn said thoughtfully, not wholly to himself.

"I know!" the mouse declared, almost frightening himself, "That building where the train stops, we could have tea and cookies there!" "Cookies? I love cookies!" answered the unicorn.

So the mouse and the unicorn sat down and had tea and cookies – Milano cookies and Earl Grey tea to be precise – and swapped manly stories while planning to make waffles in the morning. The unicorn promised to return the following evening and perhaps he would bring some crumpets. Over the course of the evening they had discovered that not only had neither one of them ever had crumpets, neither of them had the slightest clue as to what they were.

The unicorn and the mouse fabricated a wonderful and quite amusing friendship over the next few months; building it on the sturdy foundation of something they both enjoyed immensely – food. Well, not just food, they had other things in common, but food was very important to both of them – right up there with world peace. Anyway, the mouse and the unicorn became best friends and would not let anything come between them, not even a crumpet.

As time passed by, so did the train, but that is irrelevant. No it's not! One day, a circus train passed by and the unicorn was offered a summer job working in the blue tent – the most sought after tent in the circus. He hesitated, but after his friend told him that he would be a fool to turn it down and he would be fine without him, he took the job. The mouse really was OK with it; he just missed his friend more than he thought he would. The tea was not quite so sweet, the cookies not as scrumptious without the joyous air the unicorn brought with him everywhere. Even the eccentric Mr. Donaldson, the highlight of most days, could not cheer him up. He wasn't depressed, just so alone with his tea and



vince him that the unicorn had been a bad influence to begin with, "After all, it's his fault that you missed my play!" He still missed him, though. He kept thinking of all of the unicorn's wonderful traits - his laughter, and love of food; his spontaneity and love of food, his sense of humor, especially when it came to food, and how he genuinely smiled when he was happy. He decided that it would be best to bury himself in his work selling produce - and it worked, but he knew that he was not the same. He discovered that it is true that you don't know what you were missing until you've found it, and you don't know what you had until you've lost it. His funny friend has taught him that. He had even begun to resent him a little bit. What if he never came back? What of their vow to be

cookies. Mrs. Basile tried to con-

friends forever? nouse was not alone

The mouse was not alone in his loneliness, though. Well, he was, but the unicorn was too, as only the best of friends are. The unicorn liked his

job weil enough, but there were no cookies, no tea, and nobody to share them with. He missed his little friend, and wondered when, oh when, would the

summer end?

Just as the mouse began to lose hope, he noticed a strange train go by. It stopped at the building where he had shared Milano cookies and Earl Grey tea so many times. He peered out the corner of his eye, not wanting to be noticed by passers-by. Was it? Could it be? "Back two weeks early, just to see me?" He whispered so softly he could hardly discern his own voice.

...And then this unicorn walked by...

The mouse said, "How do you do?"

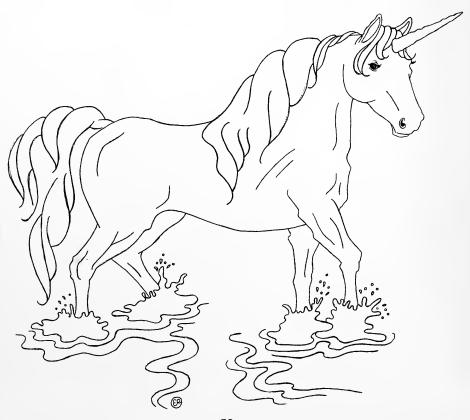
Followed by his, "Fine, and you?"

The mouse's response was a renowned, "Fine, now that you've come around." "Glad to be of service," was his reply, as he showed off his horn to passers-by.

"I was worried that you might be nervous."

He turned so quickly and gave a look of marveled astonishment, "You thought I would not show?" "I think they are calling for snow," the mouse said, forgetting why he had thought the unicorn may have been reluctant to reappear.

"Cold, then? Have you any tea and cookies?" he inquired. "Why, perhaps," and to the cabinet they both retired.



### -Brian Whitaker-

# Upon Entering Abaddon

Darkness, darkness, surrounded by darkness,
As I begin falling into an abyss.
To what depths I've gone I cannot fathom.
Incessantly falling, there's no bottom.
I've stopped, where could I be? I know naught where.
The stench of brimstone oppresses the air.
My ethereal body begins quaking,
I know this place, this can't be happening!
Trepidation takes hold, I try running,
But I am inert. I start sniveling.
Why? What have I done to become so tainted?
You promised the kingdom, I lamented.

Slovenly I move towards this demonic thing.
The beast sat there and looked at me grinning.
Seven times its evil tail went around,
No, no I screamed as I fell to the ground.
However it was too late to prostrate,
And there was no way I could evade my fate.
Now I sit transfixed for all eternity,
While winged abominations prick me.
Gibbering and blaspheming in my strife,
Cursing the great Beguiler of all life.

# Nikki Sherman Morning

Light prickled on my face, challenging the darkness to retreat into its cave as dawn crawled over the horizon. However, my eyelids remained tightly shut. Thus, I slipped back into a shallow slumber.

Suddenly a shrill sound stabbed at my ears, sending fatigue flying away. I opened my eyes, blinking rapidly in the pale light. The rubber webbing, a barrier at the front of my square

bedroom, was being unclipped. As usual, curiosity overtook me, so I headed over to the door. There it was that reality sank in—morning had arrived. No more time for sleep or play; work needed to be done.

The Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair gave me a pat on the neck, then entered my room. She approached my head, whispering quietly in my ear. I noticed the nylon contraption that she held, so when I felt the firm thrust of her thumb along my tongue, I opened my mouth for the metal ring to slide inside.



Absent-mindedly, I chewed on the bit, taking note of the repeated cha-ching each time my teeth rubbed across it. I'd heard about toys called pacifiers that human babies use, and as I had never seen one before, I imagine them to be similar to this. Next, the Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair lightly tossed a green and white cloth over my back, followed by two soft pads, and finally by the heavy leather saddle. I knew what was coming, so I inconspicuously sucked in my breath, then blew out as far as I could to enlarge my stomach. When the Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair was finished wrapping the cursed band known as a girth around my body, I was delighted to discover that upon releasing the air from my lungs, I had plenty of room to breathe.

Next I was led into the aisle, where a small human was lifted onto my back. The tight hold on my mouth was released as The Man With the Soft Hands and the Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair exchanged words in their own language, so I headed out of the barn on my own, focusing on reaching the sandy terrain which I knew was on the top of the hill. Suddenly I felt air forced out of my lungs. Ah, shoot, The Man With the Soft Hands had caught me drifting and tightened the girth. Darn it. Oh well, at least I would not have to deal with the feeling of the saddle slipping all over my body.

Together we climbed the hill, finally reaching the racetrack. I gloried in the wonderful feeling of my feet sinking into the soft sand as I trotted along the outside fence. Wind whipped through my mane, sending joyous chills down my spine, and before I knew what I was doing, I lifted myself into the air and threw my hind feet out in a playful buck. The Man With the Soft Hands leaned back in the saddle, pulling gently on my mouth and quietly chastising me. Oh, what does he know? He's not stuck in a ten by ten foot confinement for twenty-three hours a day! This short hour of time allotted for me to exercise was my favorite period of the day! After a short while, he carefully guided me in a semi-circle, then closer to the inside rail, until we were The next few minutes were a blur, with the saddle and bridle coming off and a halter and lead chain getting snapped onto my head. Events finally slowed down when I was led outside onto the pavement, where cool water was run over my hot body, followed by a gentle lather of soap. I craned my neck around to look at myself, and was not surprised to see my veins enlarged, for they were hard at work, heavily pumping blood to the farthest reaches of my body.

The Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair led me around and around the barn, letting my raspy breathing slow to a gentle whisper. Occasionally a bucket of water was offered to me, and I gladly accepted it, enjoying the feeling of the cool liquid sliding down my dry esophagus. Finally I was taken back outside, where water was used to wash the remaining crust and dirt off my legs and feet, then I was allowed to return to my room.

I was pleased to see a pile of hay and alfalfa lying in the corner, but was absolutely elated to discover that my feed tub was filled with grain. I buried my nose inside, savoring flavor of both sweet and bleeder feed. Occasionally I caught a slight taste of something that was obviously not food, but I realized it was probably some sort of vitamin or medication. I remembered a time when I came back from the racetrack and felt my entire back and hind end cramp up. It hurt so badly that I did not want to move, so I resisted the Girl With the Oat-Colored Hair when she tried to walk me. I was eventually put in my room without receiving a bath. Then a tall man came and stuck me with a needle. I let out a squeal of surprise, but the next thing I knew, the pain was gone. Ever since that day, my food had tasted a bit funny.

After I had finished eating, another girl, the Girl With the Hay-Colored Hair, clipped my halter to the wall, and I was brushed from ears to tail. She even picked up my feet and pulled all of the dirt out from inside my shoes. Then a white clay was placed on my front legs from my knees to my ankles and before it could dry, pieces of cotton and plastic were wrapped around the clay to keep it cool and wet for the night. Fluffy white bandages were then placed around all four of my legs for protection.

Finally I was released, the halter removed, the webbing closed, and the lights switched off. I retreated to the back of my stall, where for a few



Photo by Nikki Sherman

moments I nibbled on the hay and alfalfa. Eventually, renewed darkness and fatigue returned to my eyes, and before I knew it, the once-mighty light recoiled. My eyelids slipped shut and sleep overtook my mind.

### Running

Running far

From that which hunts
Never ceasing

Always chasing

Must escape

Can't escape Don't give up

No choice but to

NO CHOICE DAY TO

Something

Looking, searching for

Something that remains hidden

Drop to the ground from exhaustion

No more can I run Stand up to face my foe

Seeing love in their eye

Still I keep searching

Must not give in Can't let her do it Freedom I need

Freedom I won't get

### Buzzing

Busy bee
Buzzing around
Bring nectar wherever it is found
Building the hive with the nectar she brings
Busy little bee

Treasure

Dragon treasure is Something to be admired Gold, silver, and gems

Poems by David Gillette

## Friends Forever Jessica Snyder

Have you ever met someone,

You feel you've always known?

Someone who can finish your sentence,

Before your thoughts are even done?

A friendship you feel you could never leave,

And no matter how hard you've tried to lie,

It's them you can deceive?

Someone who always knows the truth,

Though you can look them in the eye?

Someone from whom even deep secrets can not hide?

And even as you may sometimes fight,

And often even do,

To have a friend like this,

Is to have a friend like you.



### SEAN DALLAS

## VIVE'S ARGOMENT FOR LOVE

Waking up and feeling truly refreshed because of a dream I had. Not just any dream, but a dream about being in love. A dream of being truly, madly, deeply, head-over-heels, God help me, I'm in love, loving life, can't wait to spend another day with you, type of love. The kind of love that infects you like a toxin and drunkens you with a "shake your head and get with it" blur of hysteria and madness. The kind of love that you can't get rid of for hours, even days after the dream. It comes back to you hundreds of times a day, the day of, then even after a few days, still floats along in your bloodstream, striking at your heart every few minutes, making it beat a little faster, easing the day's burden with the thoughts of being with her, of kissing her, yes, of kissing her.

Ah, yes, of kissing her. I'm closing my eyes and am dreaming again of kissing her. Her lips are so, so soft. So soft. She shakes in my arms as I am kissing her. Her lips open just slightly and I am kissing her madly. My passion for her is intense. I can't believe I am feeling like I am. I can't control it. I can't help myself. I can't leave her. I can't stop kissing her, holding her.

Ah, I am holding her and she is holding me. Our arms are entwined like vines wrapping themselves like tentacles holding on for dear life, yes, for life itself. I can feel her bare back just under her shirt and her skin reaches out for me and gives me hope. Her warmth and her breathing and her warmth are reaching out for me and giving me my own breath. I find it hard to breathe. She has for all purposes taken me, my own self, away and melded it with her own self. Our essences are of one.

And that's after only kissing her for a few moments. I'm so afraid of what will happen to me if I do. And I wonder what she thinks as I caress her forehead and pull my fingers through her hair and smile at her and she smiles back. What is she thinking?

Does she know? I think she does.

And I feel naked. I feel exposed. I am open and defenseless against her. I don't have a wall built up to protect myself when I am with her and I wonder if she knows it. I think she does.

I close my eyes and try to think of protecting myself. I've been here before. We all have. When the one who makes you complete is right in front of you and looking at your eyes and looking at your soul and looking through your, my soul.

I am helpless. I am helpless. I can't help it. I can't protect myself. And the tears well up inside of me and I get that choked up ball in the back of my throat and I can't protect myself and I am weeping.

And she's wiping the tears away with her thumb. A beautiful thumb it is, indeed. It is a beautiful thumb and I'm in love with the thumb that is wiping my tears away and I wonder if she knows.

I think she does.

I can't stop thinking about her. I'm trying to tell this story, but I can't stop thinking about her. Like that toxin again is attacking my heart. Did I tell you about her eyes?

Oh my God, her eyes. I just walked away to talk to a coworker about this dream and try to get some kind of counseling because I'm actually shaking thinking about it. I'm having a hard time functioning today. I can't believe this is happening.

It's now four hours since I awoke and I can still smell her. Not the perfume she might be wear-

ing and not the fresh shower I heard her in a few moments ago, but her. Her scent. Her aura. I can smell her hair. Her neck. A lovely neck. Oh, but to touch that neck.

Oh joy to be in love and the love of the joy and with that it's gone. Fading like a vacation to the heavens above. Like the echo of parade of smiling faces on a warm, sunny day in May.

My reflections of being with her linger still, yet the feeling of being in love is a blade thrice spliced. Once by a feeling of what is right, what is wrong, what to write and of what is left. Twice by being twice bitten before and stung so deeply, months, nay, years passed before full recovery. Thrice by the memory of love gone and of love passed. I wonder if she knows the pain and torture I feel when I am with her even though only in my mind.

I think she does.

I think I was a dreamer.

Was it a dream? I don't know if it's a dream or not. I lie on this bed and silently wonder if, what the whole thing means, meant.

I long for the day when things were easier to define, easier to figure out. When blue was blue and yellow was yellow.

The vision of her has faded a little more now. I don't recall as vividly the feelings I had for her. I can't quite remember. Can't quite get my hands around why things were the way they were. I do remember the feeling of being in her arms. I remember the way my heart was ruling over every thought my experienced brain was thinking.

"When was the last time we felt like this?"

"I remember it alright, I remember it. And after it all ended, it sucked big time. Guess you don't remember how you broke right down the middle?

"No. No, I can't I can't remember that. But that's why we have you around. To remind us of events in the past, to bully us into behaving ourselves."

"And you better behave yourself."

"Behave? Behave. I remember the instructions a little differently than you do perhaps. I remember the instructions including a subsection on how I overrule all judgments that I may disagree with. Remember that? Do you remember that?"

"Yeah, I remember that."

"And you conveniently forgot."

"Yeah, I forgot. Con-veniently, I have forgotten who has the final say and conveniently, you have forgotten what trouble you got into the last time you had the final say."

"I have the final say."

"Fine."

"Fine."

Fine, I said. I'm going in. I'm going for it. I'm reaching out, unprotected, willing to go again for love. For true love. For the one who lights up a room. For the one who makes me gasp for air.

### A Perfect Rainbour

Gray is the color of my day
but a true blue friend like yeu
can make the world spin when I
see your white smile across your
sun lit face
and the
glimmer in your dark brown eyes
Iknow I libe allright

Surprise!

The color of yellow can make a follow
friend
ferget about the
cold black day
or how I
felt the pain of a
shiny red dart thrown
deep in myheart straight from the green envy
of a purple wearing enemy

Only you can tickle me pink with your silly wink and your frilly orange scarf

Yet white the wings of an Angel

which you wear

makes me stop and think how you do what you do

But before I do

Cnce again I must stop

and thank you

for helping me through my day

Indrea Hood



### Brenda Ross

# If Only...

There's this guy I like so much but it feels as if he doesn't notice me. A paralyzing fear comes over my body and freezes my

mind when he enters a room.

Lack of self-esteem prevents me

from interacting in any way.

Eye contact is never made.

Tension builds to a crippling level.

I hide as if to seem invisible; scared he will think I'm not good enough for him.

If I'm not seen or heard there will be no judgment made. In my eyes he appears to be perfect like an angel sent from God.

His charm, kindness, and good looks are like the sunlight warming my skin on a cold day.

It would mean more than the whole world to me just to be near him...to hear his voice.

The warmth of his body engulfing me; the sound of his voice gently caressing my ears.

Wishing and praying that maybe someday he might just look my way.

How grateful I would be,

If only he would notice me.

## Fading Infatuations

What they say cannot be true
Or I wouldn't have fallen in love with you

yet as I look into your eyes
I see the secret you desperately disquise

You made me believe through it all Our relationship was one never to befall And I believed you for it was true I had fallen madly in love with you

So here we are many nules apart

Our romantic relationship yet to start

And so I gaze upon the shimmering stars

I loathe the passion not meant to be ours

for your heart has drifted

To a passion so new

The secret is

I never had a chance with you

And so my gaze continues
As the shimmering stars lose their twinkle
for the love I thought to be so true

Has faded away

Zust like yai 9Xmf



### Christopher A. Mullen

### The Coder from Valles

Sure! Yeah! Jason considered himself lucky; after all it was the luck of the draw, or something like that. He had just been born at the right time, and the right place for him to be selected. It wasn't even as if he had a choice in it. He was just chosen at birth, as one of the young ones who would wear the code. The code was set up to replace some of the Social Security numbers and records that went with them, those that were lost in the war. It was tattooed on the inside of his right forearm. The number read, 713-200121-58-1912838. Jason rubbed the number softly with the ring and index finger of his left hand. The ink of the tattoo was sort of an iridescent blue-gold, just below the skin. Below that, like a massive underline, was a series of lines of varying thicknesses, some thick, some thin, and some, somewhere in between. This indicated that he was a "coder" as some of the writers in magazines and newspapers had "dubbed" him. Some of his friends, and acquaintances, also sported the code. Jason thought about the number, he considered it lucky. It seemed magical the way it floated, just beneath his skin.

Also it was magical and lucky in the fact that there were eighteen numbers in the code, three eights, three twos, three ones, a seven, a thirteen, there were also two zeros and a five and a nine thrown in, just for balance.

His mom had told him, that in the old days a seven, and a thirteen, were thought of as lucky numbers, by people who 'gambled'...But Jason had to look up that word, and its meaning, on the Infoscan at his local Information Center. He still found it hard to figure out why a person would squander their resources in that fashion, since probability and the numbers that predict their occurrence were just so disappointing in a random set.

But the thing that Jason most loved about the code that was tattooed to his right forearm was that it gave him literally...everything...that he could ever want in this life...that is, everything that the material world had to offer. He was one of a minority, a lucky minority, that were privileged in the world. All he had to do to get what he wanted was to let the product manufacturer or service provider scan his forearm, and that product, or service, was his. He could walk out of a store or mall with the things that he wanted or needed. It was a really cool and awesome thing.

The three eights in his number were signifiers of prosperity, these numbers represented the highest rating for benefits and acquisitions that was possible in his society... "The United World States" that was the society that he lived in in the 22nd century.

His real country, or state, was "Valles Marinennes" on the planet Mars. His fellow countrymen just called their country affectionately "Valles" for short. It was a state that had come into being originally from the original (U.S.A.) United States of America which no longer was in official existence, although North America for the most part was still there (the places that the other side had not bombed, that was). The War, that was when everything changed, according to Uncle Theseus. That was then the earth experienced a two-year nuclear winter. There followed massive extinctions of animals and plant life because of the nuclear winter. It was a time when ninety percent of the governments of the world ceased to be. A great deal of order, information, and records were forever lost. Senseless small wars broke out between countries, even states within countries. At one point the former USA dissolved into as many as twelve separate states. Canada into three. Mexico – five – all claiming sovereignty, to the North-American continent. This squabbling went on, something close to fifty years, and that was just the western hemisphere.

The rest of the world suffered equally. There were food riots, famines, and plagues. The Black Plague re-emerged, Ebola, STDs, and even Smallpox arose and decimated 50% to 75% of the world's population. No one was really sure which side had started the war, or why. But it had been like falling dominoes, or a Pandora's Box, once it started. It left the world a whole lot sadder and more impoverished with a whole lot less information, people, energy, and resources.

Fortunately someone in one of the governments had been wise enough to offer a cease-fire and diplomatic solutions, on the second day of bombing, and the "Two Day War" was over. But not before it had done a terrible amount of damage to the earth and its biosphere, and the world's countries and sovereignties.

Jason was happy! He was glad! Because his Uncle Theseus, who was a planetary meteorologist, had told him, the way he had figured it, one more day of bombing in the "Two Day War," and the earth would not have recovered. All human and animal life would have ceased to exist. So in a sense Jason was lucky that his people, his ancestors, his race and even his species had survived the "Two Day War."

Most of Jason's ancestors had been either doctors, scientists, or technicians; they mostly had letters after their last names. So Jason was attending Newton Junior University and that was the best education that his code could buy, in Valles. Jason wanted to grow up to become either a planetary geologist, a pilot, or some other type of technologist, or advanced degree doctorate in science, so that he could get a spaceflight rating. He wanted the training so he could train to be a pilot, navigator, Captain or project scientist on one of Valles' socspacmissions. These were special missions, which if Jason got on, he'd be able to do the kind of science that interested him. And Jason loved science. Like the project "Zgremars2050ad" which had been sponsored by the "United World States" with the cooperation and generosity of the states-'Reunited Germany,' 'Briton,' 'UE-france,' 'RisingEast,' and 'NATS' (which stood for North American Treaty States), the former U.S. This had been a socspacmission that had accomplished the colonization of Mars and the founding of the country "Valles" on the planet Mars. This mission had been accomplished by joint donations and a joint mission statement of all the involved countries of the "United World States." The colonization of Mars was accomplished 100 years before Jason's birth, by terra-formation of the planet's surface, and atmospheric enrichment of Mars.

Jason looked around the spacious room that was his bedroom. Yeah! He had plenty of things that he valued, that would cost flatlanders and noncoders a fortune! Like his authentic circa 1930 Martin acoustic guitar: Even if you could find it on the Earth, Moon or Mars, it would cost 38,000 nats or 720 suns, whichever currency you preferred to deal in.

He also owned a portable observatory for his planetary studies that had a value of 20,000,000 nat/pesos. It had been shipped from Chihuahua, NATS.

Any electronic black box was his for the asking, and Jason had a taste for gadgets. He had a miniature portable astrogator, every bit as accurate as the ones that NATS pilots and navigators used. He had a Creymicropalmputer that did everything that the desk models did, and then some. Plus he could have had the best of everything in clothes, books, mall purchases, food, fuel, vacations, you name it. The only things that the code would not purchase were things that "The United World States" had deemed unhealthy, or of a political nature that ran counter to the policies and views of the U.W.S. And if you really wanted that stuff, you could get it on the free market. It wasn't like money had ceased to exist. No, far from it. Jason wasn't tempted, because he believed in the U.W.S.'s motto "A clean body, a clean mind, a clean world." Anyway the idea worked for him.

Yes there were "other" views that Jason had become aware of, such organizations as 'Mars First,' 'The New Code World Order': These organizations wanted to go back to an economic system that had no code. Economic advantages had nothing to do with the code, really, that was just luck. That was something Jason didn't really understand about people sometimes. You

participated in the code because you were a good person. Because you were patriotic, and it was a good thing. The code was helping to rebuild the world. Keeping the world safe from nuclear annihilation. A whole new government had set up the code to make sure that there was equity amongst countries and people so there would be no inherent disadvantages between them, that would lead to the horror that became the "Two Day War." The code was to help people. The code was totally voluntary. Nobody was forced to be coded. Sure you were assigned a number at birth. But you didn't have to get tattooed until you were twelve. They were told the advantages and possible disadvantages (although Jason couldn't think of any) of being assigned a code. As young as five you became aware of the code. It was covered in every elementary class, just like sex education, or hygiene. And you didn't really opt in completely until you were eighteen, when you were assigned your duty code. Some people were just sore because they didn't get as high a rating as they might've liked. That was nobody's fault; that was just the randomness of the computer. Sure it was random. But it was fair. Anyway that's how Jason felt about it. To get the code took all of five minutes. It didn't hurt, it was done by laser. Jason thought, even if a citizen got a low rating with their code, there were other definite advantages to having the code, like membership in the "Young Citizens of the United World States" organization which gave out scholarships to young students regardless of their rating by the code. His good friend Rhea was an example. She had had a low code rating. But she was really smart. She had done well at Marie Curie Junior University. She was sure to get a good duty code tomorrow, Jason thought. Jason turned out the light, and rolled over in his bed to get comfortable. Well tomorrow will tell, thought Jason. Tomorrow his good friend Rhea and he would both graduate at the ceremony, get their duty codes, and their assignments! He was looking forward to the big day! Although Jason couldn't understand the knot in his stomach. Tomorrow Jason was going to be eighteen years old. His Mom and Dad were there! It was exciting. The rush of adrenaline, as he went up to the podium to get his diploma, and his duty code. There were flashbulbs going off, as everyone took pictures and talked in excited whispers, and shouts of encouragement and good cheer. His Dad patted him heartily on the back. Jason was happy! And excited. The whole thing felt like a rush of blue and gold colors with all the ribbons and bunting of the decorated auditorium. He even saw Rhea near the beginning of the ceremony. He waved to her. She looked happy and excited! He really didn't hear or remember what the keynote speaker had said. He was a decorated mission pilot from N.A.T.S., he seemed smiling and encouraging. The keynote pilot was blonde and well tanned. The pilot waved to the crowd as he sat down, near the end. Jason excitedly opened the envelope, and started to read the numbers and words written there...

"Dear Jason, we are proud to assign you a duty code of 10-10-10. As you know, this is the highest duty code assignable, and means you will be assigned to scientific exploration and research in near Mars orbit, and on the planet. And further will be given A1 status for flight training. You will be vested in all spacsocmissions of your choice. Congratulations!! Also in consideration of the above, you are required to attend the farewell and departure of your friend Rhea in her new assignment on Titan-Oberon III. Congratulations again!! Sincerely, Thor Thorogood, Director and Secretary of Duty Code Assignment."



## "Our Love is Divine"

Tear drops pour down my checks My eyes run like a raying water fall This water salted with the passion of my heart Pours out of my eyes to douse you with my love

Cach journey we took sticks in my mind

The sights of the sun shining against the sky

The wind whisks the leaves as we escort each other down life's path

As we glance at one another, we affix our eyes; the moment is perfect

Every word you've spoken to me lingers in my mind Every conversation is engraved in my memory The script is written with the most beautiful words The meaning of the engraving lies gilded in my heart

When we spend time together We embrace each other like links of a chain...inseparable As you press your heud against my chest You hear the others pounding at my heart's gate; buh-boom buh-boom

> Don't let anyone into the gates of my heart you are already through the gates The chain is locked with our love for each other You hear the pounding: the gates are invincible

You are the gate keeper of my heart
You guard the gates and you locked the chain
You have let no one else through those gates
No one else will take your place

The future lies ahead of us like a shadow in the dark As long as we're together and you're keeping my heart No one will disjoin the chuin Our love is divine

Juson Hye

## The Wondrous Things in Life

Midnight skies and a zhining moon Shortly after a sanny noon Gazing aimlessly at the stars Ignoring the sound of all the ears Picture perfect in a sky of blue Knowing what's fake and what is true

Clouds may seem small and shrill
But when in the sky they give a chill
They travel fost with nowhere to go
But when not in sight the sars will show
They only shine when it is night
It is because they are our only light

B: the man on the moon give us a glare The moon shines with wondrous flare When night is over the sun will shine Taking away the night's refine

The sun shines with fire red It is now time to rise from bed Inother day in a crowded street Vaiting for the day's defeat



May Eleno Morm 2.3

Nating for that midnight sky
Nutching the time to pass us by
The time is short, yet so slow
Running around with nowhere to go
Nandering around, going new places
Sheeting new people, and seeing new faces

The clock has finally hit eight o'clock People still wander from block to block The day is over and night is here But day will shortly be quite near

### ALWAYS TOGETHER

Count on me. When times get rough, know that I am always there.

Believe in me. Accept my hopes and dreams and aid me in achieving them.

Trust in me. I am here to guide you, to see you through in difficult and fantastic times.

Help me live. Let me experience what the world has to offer and have a great time in doing so.

Be there for me. When I need a shoulder to cry on or a confidant, listen to my words.

Teach me. Tell me of your experiences, where you have been and what you have done. I love to hear your stories.

Never leave me. Stay by my side and hold me in your arms forever. I can't think of my life without you. I hope that we will always be together.

~Josh Righter

### more

A girl spinning in the snow A nervous boy at the door A smile and a hug We should not ask for anything more.

A girl dancing in the spring A grinning boy in allure A kiss and a touch We always dream of the something more.

> A girl languishing in heat A smug boy lowering lure A breath and a "love" We cannot ask for anything more.

A girl crunching the dead leaves A downcast boy feeling poor A meaningless brush We should not have wanted any more.

A woman frozen in snow A mindless man at the door A boy peeks outside We don't know anything any more.

### Dan Aloia

## Behold the misery

Clouds of misery,
Crowds that I cannot see,
I'm not proud of what I may be.
Drown what's left and all that's true,
Iricks and treason is what is now and new.
Iripped on treacherous entanglement,
I will not be taken lightly by a hypocrite.
Kept inside for so long,
The burning, the urge,
The fury; keep away and soon fade, while I stay.

\*\*\*

Fllways follow your heart because you'll have nothing else to dream for. Love is so precious, so capture it with your heart while you still can. Don't listen to what's going on in your head, it is full of cluttered thoughts going a mile a minute - too complicated. Instead, follow your heart.

### Instant Water; or, The Parable of the Armadillo

One day, a man acquired an armadillo as a pet. He became very fond of this pet and took it with him everywhere he went. As time passed, he began to believe that, because his armadillo was so wonderful, all armadillos were wonderful. From there, it was an easy step to the belief that, since the armadillo was universally wonderful, there ought to be armadillos everywhere. And from there it was an easy step to the belief that there were armadillos everywhere.

When the man approached his friends with his theory, he found to his surprise that they did not entirely believe him; even if, they told him, armadillos are universally wonderful, there is no reason to suppose that armadillos are present everywhere. Now though the man may have been slightly mad, he was certainly not stupid: he decided to perform an experiment to test his theory. It so happened that in his town at this time a great new hotel was about to open, a twelve-story glass and steel tower with dozens of rooms. The man knew this was the place to test his idea; he would personally inspect each room in the hotel, to see whether in fact there was an armadillo in each room.

At last the great day arrived: he would enter the hotel and see if there was, as he believed there ought to be, an armadillo everywhere. As was his practice everywhere he went, he took his pet armadillo with him, and with the armadillo underneath his arm he rode the elevator to the top floor of the hotel. Dutifully, he entered every room and looked around for the expected armadillo. He looked on the bed, in the closet, behind the curtains. Everywhere. And in each room, he looked at the armadillo there in his arms and declared, "Behold!" There is an armadillo in this room! My

theory is proved!"

And so it was.

Dr. Richard Hunt



### My Best Friend

The awkwardness we felt was of mystery and curiosity

We never spoke a single word to each other before this night

Standing out in the cold rain; the steam poured from our mouths as we exhaled

The thunder clashed and we spoke our first words to each other

We first met a long time ago
seems I've known you my whole life
Once far apart
Nowadays, inseparable

The thunder clashing sounded like the voice of God

It was destined that we met that night

cold, wet, and frightened

words we spoke warmed us with hope

I hoped that one day we can be close and together
The hope, spiritual; felt in my soul
The days passed
That became a reality; we're closer than ever

Your dark eyes; hair like gold
With a razor sharp smile
You cut into my heart
My love spills out for you

The time we spend together is priceless

Days grow shorter, seasons change to cold

Days grow longer, seasons grow warm

When is the next time I can be with you?

I give you my coat when the cold bites

We travel together

We play music together

You are my confidant

When we tell each other secrets

We promise not to tell anyone

That pact has not been breached

Our trust in each other grows stronger

You have a residence in my heart
girded with steel
bounding our idealistic love for each other
creates an immortal dwelling in my soul

The residence you have sings with music

We walk in the courtyards holding hands, smiling
sitting down by the riverside, telling about our lives

We show how much we mean to each other

You are there for me all of the time
No reasons are necessary
Eager to help me as I am you
You always help me see things through

You keep me alive when I feel dead
You brighten even the cloudiest of days
always being there for me time and again
You are what keeps me delighted when I am grief-stricken

The sands of time keep falling faster and faster
The hairs on our heads will grow gray and frail
Our friendship will grow older
Our friendship will grow stronger and more lively

Our souls will depart from Earth

We will move on to a brave new world
together hand in hand, eye to eye, smile to smile
I'll take your hand and you'll take mine, and our testimony continues

-Jason Nye

## Endless Eyes

Have you ever looked into the face
Of a being so utterly and completely
Consumed by grief
That their eyes
Are jagged chasms and go to
Depths
That you can't even begin to imagine?

Endless eyes
That see nothing
And so reflect nothing
Yet everything that is anything
Is within them

I have seen those eyes And they pierced me To my soul

Or what was left of it

After knowing what I thought could never be known

My soul shook

Those endless eyes

Will cry no more But the anguish within them Will never cease its wailing

A beast with its torn heart
And ravished mind
Will always pace
Behind those endless eyes



## STARRY DIGHTS

YOU SHOULD HAVE A GIRL ON A MIGHT LIKE THIS WRAPPED IN YOUR ARMS FOR ONLY YOU TO KISS

AS TREES BEGIN TO SWAY
AND THE WIND BLOWS BY
YOUR BODY TOUCHES HERS IN A WAY THAT MIGHT DEFY

YOUR BODY BEGINS TO TREMBLE
AS THE WIND BLOWS ON YOUR FACE
TIGHTER YOU WRAP YOUR ARMS AROUND HER
YOU'VE FINALLY FOUND YOUR PLACE

THE WIND BLOWS STRONGER NOW AS A KISS LIES UPON YOUR CHEEK GOOSEBUMPS LACE YOUR BODIES LIKE RIPPLES UPON A CREEK

AS YOU LIE BENEATH THE GLIMMERING STARS
WATCHING FIREFLIES FLOAT BY
A CREEK MEETS A STAGGERING STREAM
AND YOUR DREAM BEGINS TO DIE

WhY DON'T YOU OPEN UP AND TELL HER HOW YOU FEEL

SHE LOVES YOU\_YOU LOVE HER

GOD DEALT YOU THE PERFECT DEAL

YOU SHOULD HAVE A GIRL ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS WRAPPED IN YOUR ARMS FOR ONLY YOU TO KISS

BUT FOR NOW MY DREAM CONTINUES

WHILE NOTHING SEEMS TO BE

TAMMY\_DEAR TAMMY\_

PLEASE HOLD ON FOR ME

YOU'RE EVERYTHING I'LL EVER NEED AND YOU FILL MY EVERY DREAM\_



## The Gleaner

# High School Writing Competition

The English department is very happy to have sponsored its seventh high school writing competition, which was designed to showcase the work of young writers in the area. We are amazed at the talent, sensitivity, and ear for language in their poetry and prose.

Our thanks and congratulations go to them, their families, and, of course, their English teachers!

L.M.

## A Commentary on the Moon

Walking up the hill to my house, having just seen Michael to his train, I step lightly and turn at awkward angles to avoid crushing newly fallen azalea petals, garish pink against the dun sidewalk. I also avoid tripping on gaps in the ground, because my eyes are not looking where I'm going. They are locked in awe on the sky, always tracing the lunar trajectory, even as it passes momentarily behind houses and dogwoods, and is strangled by the black wires stretching through the twilight.

I sigh inwardly, and since, except for me and my shadow, the street's deserted, I don't pay attention to whether such sounds are audible. The sky is a sheet of grey satin, encompassing me tightly enough so that I am made aware of my exaggerated breathing, but still loose enough so that I know I have room to toss and turn. We, the sky and I, are bathed in the melting luminosity cast by a moon streaked with magnoliablossom pink clouds which shift and sway in the night's breeze. I feel sad about the moon, though, because I want to show it to him, my Michael, but I know that were I to do so, he wouldn't see the lovely pink clouds passing over it, but instead a mass of dullish brown obscuring his only light source.

You can't smell the moon, at least not from this far away, but you can smell the steadily darkening sky. Especially on a night like tonight, after a misting of northern rain, when the mottled black pavement shimmers under the street lights that yawn and stretch when I squint my eyes. The breeze carries the scent of freshly cut grass spattered with early twilight dew, and I inhale deeply, and feel the twinge of memory that always comes, and then I don't know whether I smell the air itself, or if my mind is substituting in what it thinks is supposed to go there. I part my lips a bit, and they're dry, and I start breathing through my mouth, which for me has the same effect as closing my eyes when listening to a symphony; one sense is cut off, so I can concentrate more on the others. I would breathe through my nose, but it's too frustrating not knowing what is real and what is memory, so I've mostly given up.

Instead, I take extreme joy in color. Specifically color. I love other aspects of sight, but I have to love color above all; it is my obligation. I have to love it enough for two people and then I have to bottle up the joy that that experience affords me, and dose it out to him and then, even without having seen that which was its source, he can sense my joy, and take it unto himself, and we can revel in it together. Only this way can we both enjoy the world and our interactions with it as fully as we could, were we both capable of experiencing every sense to its fullest.

Similarly, he loves scents, and constantly stops to smell flowers, the color of

which he can't identify. He'll bend down gingerly, then stand up to his full height, puffing out his chest and pointing excitedly at the blossom for me to smell it, but rather than enjoying its smell, I enjoy the pleasure that he takes in it, and then I'll tell him of its lovely crimson color, and we'll continue wordlessly wherever we were going.

I'm at a very different place than he in the matter, because I had my sense of smell for about ten years of my life, until it began deteriorating with the constant sinus problems, and eventually my tonsils and adenoids had to come out so that my senses of smell and taste wouldn't both leave me completely. He, on the other hand, has always been deuteranope (a kind of red-green deficiency), which saddens me deeply, and simultaneously makes my obligation to him much stronger, and much harder, too, because I can't tell him "that's rose red," or "that's sea green,": common clichés to which I would expect him to associate colors.

I really don't know what to tell him, because he can't see that a bush of azaleas has two different colors on it, and were I to wear outrageous red lipstick, he might notice that my lips were shinier than usual, but nothing more; they'd always be the same sort of sickly grey. I'm sure he feels a similar way about telling me smells, because he can really only say that a flower smells lovely, but not what it smells like; it smells like itself. It's not like either of us is helpless, though; I can smell to some degree: only intense things like gasoline, brand new bike tires, and eucalyptus concentrate-some of my favorite smells. He knows that on traffic lights, red is always on top. And he sees yellow and blue as I do, and consequently blue is his favorite color.

So here I am on this same sidewalk with this same predicament; I can't decide how to feel about the moon. And this really is very troubling, because it's all I have to look at for the walk home, so it'll be weighing on my mind. After considering it, though, I decide instead of being sad for his not being here, and for his inability to see what I see, that I will enjoy my solitary dusk. I'll enjoy it so much that it will stay with me until the next time I talk to him, and I'll tell him about how lovely it was, and even if he doesn't take joy from having seen it, he'll be happy just because I am so happy about it, and then I won't have to feel sad about the moon anymore.

DALEA REICHGOTT

Germantown Academy

Dr. Drewniany

#### Incomplete

Two people stand on the mountain of white locked in each other's gaze. Petals fall around them like the tears of heaven. They are not melancholy tears, but of a joy so pure. That it has never been felt, only in dreams.

A man stands in the midst of celebrating youth. Black hats inhabit the air and float down to the ground around his feet. In his hand, he clutches a scroll that holds within it, The man's sleepless nights, numerous sacrifices, and bright future.

Beads of sweat run down a young girl's forehead.

Adrenaline surges through her body as she rushes to kick with all her might.

Her goal is so near, she can taste the salty tang of determination.

A powerful kick, a heart-felt gasp, and the cheering masses drown out the singing of the angels.

A young woman, shining with love and perfection, holds a bundle in her arms. A little boy lies sleeping, innocence radiating from him and breaking hearts of stone.

A young man stands next to his heroine, holding her hand, never to let go. Their eyes are fixed on this miracle that will bless their lives forever.

Determination pulsing through his entire body, he begins to climb. The air is cold; the metal bars provide no safety and he prays for strength. The clouds seem to be pushing him on and he knows; they believe in him. The heavens open up and light shines down on him as he reaches the top, for he is worthy of his beloved superheroes.

A grizzly man stares at the finished canvas, still shining with wet paint. Within it, he sees the pain, the confusion, and chaos of his life. He collapses, exhausted, into the nearest chair. For the first time in his life, he basks in the reverence of his creation.

A father and mother hold each other in their arms, sobbing with grief. The miserable, empty hole in their lives is too much for an old couple to bear. Their son, captured in a momentary happiness, stares from a silver frame. Then, a man in uniform bursts in to the house and cries, "They've found him! He's alive! He's coming home!"

Thousands of people, clad in shining jewels and expectant expressions crowd the hall.

She sits in the front row, her back to them and her mind restless with anticipation.

The curtains open and silence takes its rightful moment.

As if by magic, the music floats from the stage, an invisible mist, and engulfs her in its

enchanting melody.

One sits silently in the corner, watching the world with open eyes. She cries silently, for she does not understand. She has been looking for this all her life, but it remains hidden and silent. As others find their Olympus, where is hers?

JULIA SHINDEL Council Rock High School – North Mrs. Hall

### Habit

Emotionally, I was already dead, and I felt the need to be physically dead as well. My arm was swelling as I cried myself to sleep. There were about ten horizontal incisions on my upper arm, safe from ocular inspection. The blood from my creation was sticking to my shirt-sleeves, and every time I tried to separate the two, they seemed to glue themselves back together, as if they were in love. I had kept a knife hidden between the dead ground of my room and the stained spring mattress, which seemed to encase my body like a coffin. The knife was keeping me alive. However, all I wanted was for it to kill me. But something was holding me back from trying a little harder. So I kept myself alive by limiting the amount of pressure I used. And each night, death paralyzed my body for a few fantasized moments to keep my blood running and my heart beating.

Like everyone else's, my day started by waking up. Upon waking, I'd remember what I had done the night before. Then I'd feel the stinging again. It felt good, better than what I was used to feeling. In the shower, which I took every morning, the stinging would intensify, then turn to numbness. I would dry myself off with a towel, and depending upon whether or not I needed more pain, I would press the towel hard over the sensitive areas until they bled again. I dressed myself with caution, avoiding short-sleeved or white shirts. Once I wore a white shirt to school, and during class my cuts began to bleed through, almost revealing my secret obsession, almost

revealing my secret habit.

For the most part, school was satisfactory. I preferred being there as opposed to being at home. Home was too dark, too cold, and it made me feel lonely. I probably would have cut out of boredom. I had done it before. I believe few people at school knew what I was hiding up my sleeves. They couldn't have understood it anyway, so I kept my sleeves down. When no one was looking, sometimes I would sneak a glance at the cuts, perfectly lined up along my arms, because they gave me a sense of accomplishment, a sense of duty. I believed they were beautiful. After admiring these "friends" of mine, I would look around, out of habit, to see if anyone had caught a glimpse of what they were not supposed to see. Usually I was relieved of this paranoia. However, sometimes another student would ask me what had happened. That's when I'd lie and simply say, "I have a cat." A feeling of awkwardness had always swept over me when this would happen. But, it happened often. In fact, it happened so often that I nearly convinced myself I actually had a cat. It was better that way. I became used to lying, and my stories of an abusive feline became much more credible.

If school was more pleasant than I had predicted upon waking, going home wasn't so bad either. I could maintain a good mood for at least a few hours after walking home from the bus stop. But if school had been the cause of a horrible day, I would come home feeling bad, and chances were that it was going to get worse. I knew where my knife was. I knew I was only going to take it out on myself, because I was too weak to take it out on anyone else. Besides, it was no one's fault but my own, or so I thought. Before anything else, I'd run upstairs to my tomb, in anticipation, and deliberately slice open my flesh. The blood was so bright. I used to sit with my back up against the door, in case anyone were to accidentally interrupt. I could have sat there forever, watching the blood make little rivers down my arm onto the tips of my fingers, then drip off like drops of water on a leaky faucet. But I knew I would not be able to sit there forever. I had lies to keep.

Around seven o'clock was when my parents would come home from work. My mom would throw together a quick dinner and I'd have to eat with the family before my nightly death. When I'd finish eating, I'd say, "thank you," and I would run off to watch the television for an hour or two. Then it was time. I could feel my blood surging from within. It was ready to come out. Then I would go to sleep, and die, just to wake up again in Hell, wishing I were alive.

JESSICA HUMMEL Wissahickon High School Ms. Barbara Speece

I am an electron. I circulate the nucleus of the world looking for my proton. If I were any electron, I would not be a valence electron. I would be one of the two electrons in the first shell. I would live with my other electron in peace. Do you think ends would meet? Do you think the end will come? Will the strong nuclear force overcome the electromagnetic force and will I bind myself to the electron? I love you electron.

> ALEX KOZDRA Lenape Middle School Michael Boytin

### Ode to Antinous

I respected, I detested, no emotions left unfelt by me. I loved, I hated, conspirated, none emotions ever free. I paid the price with my ego, everlasting hero that I am. I the leader, fearless leader, of my group of trusty men.

My name, my beautiful name, uttered only with pride.

I the only truly worthy to make fair Penelope my bride.

I the manly, I the muscular, I the God's apple to the eye.

I am the Antinous, let all hear my story, let all hear my cry.

I came a running, when I heard it, Penelope must be wed. I knew the moment that I heard it, I be the one to share her bed. The others came, dumbly came, thinking they may have chance. I knew once she saw me, she'd not give the others even a glance.

I entered Odysseus' castle, a man who had long been dead, I took his home, let wine flow freely, every man was amply fed. The times were happy, very happy, and I quite content with life. Master Odysseus gave me much, now only to get his lovely wife.

I caressed her, I blessed her, my love about her nicely laid. But to have it returned only, very boldly, by the many silly maids. I tried every trick to make her quick forget about her old flame. I threw her shroud to the hot fire, madly to bring her shame.

Of everything I hated, none more than ghastly Telemachus, Waiting for a noble father the sea had long washed to dust. Convince him I tried, and cleverly devised a plan not to fail. Faking sympathy, I boarded him on a fatal journey to set sail.

Some strange old beggar, weak old beggar was with him on return.

Both so hopeless both so useless in hell's fire sure to burn.

But they plotted and allotted how they were to bring my fate.

How was I to know the weak and crazy were to kill me with their hate?

I impatient with the chaste woman threatened to say the least Choose a husband very quickly or I shall kill, as does a beast So she proposed and smiled as she rose to tell of the fateful test To string the bow, the giant bow, and claim her would the best.

I watched the beggar, ugly beggar, easily string the great old bow.
How I boiled, and recoiled with jealousy, though I dare not let it show.
Trying to act as if the pile of rags did not matter, I took a drink from my cup.
So she proposed and smiled as she rose to tell of the fateful test
To string the bow, the giant bow, and claim her would the best.

I watched the beggar, ugly beggar, easily string the great old bow. How I boiled, and recoiled with jealousy, though I dare not let it show. Trying to act as if the pile of rags did not matter, I took a drink from my cup. In the next instant, fatal instant, my life was slowly given up.

> VINTI SINGH North Penn High School Mrs. Simeon

### And...ACTION!

I just love movies. Although some of them are brainless entertainment that can turn my hypothetical gray matter into hypothetical gray mush, I still love movies. Trust me, I really am doing everything I can to keep from melting my aforementioned gray matter, but it is not an easy thing for a movie lover. It was when I studied the short-comings and strengths of two things – books and art - that I got interested in movies. While writing, I was disappointed to find that it lacked the rich color and detail that art has. While drawing, I was disappointed to find that it lacked the action and movement that a book has. So I thought about what had both: Movies!

A film hasn't the same plot depth as a book. But a really excellent movie can convey the same emotional power. Take Casablanca, for example. That is one incredible movie: Ingrid Bergman, Humphrey Bogart, Peter Laurie—you gotta love it. The setting: World War II; Casablanca has depth and personality and life. The inhabitants are funny and tearful and idealistic, with a startlingly sharp definition of personality and realism that brings them to life. The characters have pasts and futures, the present glowing with reality because of that. That's why I like movies.

I'm also spellbound by perfect shots and angles, fascinated with mind-bending effects. Take The Matrix, for example—Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Laurence Fishburne—it's a beautiful thing. The romance part is out of place and some of the concepts stereotypical, but the shots are beautiful. The camera work in some of those stunt scenes is incredible, bordering on transforming an action movie into a work of art. (If you don't believe me, get a load of Fishburne's sunglasses when he offers Neo the blue and red pills. If you still don't believe me—sigh—then check out the falling rain when Neo is walking into the building where Morpheus is waiting to talk to him, o ye of little faith.) (PS: If you still don't believe me about the beauty of the camera shots in The Matrix, then read no further. You are incurable and beyond my help.)

This movie's special effects are also revolutionary, the stunts breath-taking and the storyline imaginative, if inconsistent in small details. I didn't know most of the effects in that movie were possible. They are so groundbreaking and memorable that tons of movies have references to them. One of the most obvious references is the scene from Shrek where the princess kung-fu fights the band of Merry Men.

Another thing that makes me want to create movies so badly is that characters are awesome. It drives my sister crazy that my favorite characters are always villainesses. When I first saw The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, my favorite character was The White Witch. Then, of course, there is the jewel thief, LuAnne LeSeur, from Mr. Magoo—a personal favorite; Cruella DeVille of 101 Dalmations, 102 Dalmations...ad nauseum; Trinity, a retired battery pack in The Matrix verges on becoming a villainess while technically remaining the heroine; Helga Sinclair, a resident of Atlantis, the Lost Empire...the list goes on. Movies are the ideal medium for creating characters, and so I keep on studying the different personalities in movies.

I also like the versatility of movies. A filmmaker can create a heart-breaking, realistic movie that drags in the audience and makes them live it. Or she can also create a hysterically impossible movie that's just as good. All right, all right – I know what's coming. You're going to say I sound like a wannabe – like I'm going to end up waiting tables for the rest of my life while waiting for the big break that never comes. But it's not like I'm one of those "I'm going to curl up and die if I don't make movies!" people. It's just that next to making movies, nothing else seems very interesting. So I'm just hoping that somehow, someday I'll make movies – incredible movies.

So now you know it: my pet ambition, my little daydream. If someday you spot me in the cafeteria during lunch period, and you see me staring off into space, don't

worry. I haven't gone crazy. I'm just daydreaming about the movies I'll make someday. No doubt right now you're saying, "But isn't this essay supposed to be about you?" Well, it is. Now you know what I think about, and wonder about, and daydream over. You know what's going on in my mind (scary, isn't it?) (My sister, by the way, would interject here that she doesn't see me as a future filmmaker. She believes, instead, that I'm going to grow up, get involved with organized crime, and dominate the world.) Back to the subject.



What, you may ask, am I actually going to do to make the movies? Produce? Direct? Write screenplays? Suffer me to answer with another question. What does George Lucas do in his movies? For all the people out there who have never been obsessed with Star Wars, here's the answer. George Lucas has always done everything in his movies, even before he became a producer. He writes the screen play, designs the costumes, orders around makeup crew, directs the scenes, and tailors every single special-effects moment. And as if that weren't enough, he also bullies a team of artists into making his world real. He doesn't just write movies or direct movies: he creates them, molds them, and forcibly brings to life his imaginative vision. That's what I want to do. My sister still holds out for world domination as my future career. But I disagree. Why would I want to rule the world if I can make movies instead?

JULIA SOPER The American Academy

Dr. Sharon Traver

## Lazy afternoons.

Coffee-shop napping under women's magazines.

The commotion of the ground vibrating through rollerbladers-

an earthquake under bolting wheels.

As they take flight, transcending scenic gardens,

the carmine sky hurls fireballs at those who dare to explore in sun-baked hours.

The young and the old stow away in

pilfered warehouses,

congested shopping districts.

and chilling theatres,

but the adventurers wing through saturated air,

each landing hammers the concrete.

During these spiritless hours,

air clung to bodies like the touch of a child's sticky fingers on bare skin.

I walked on damp pavement and dodged inline skaters.

Children, only old enough to be ignorant of an Indian summer, gathered on barren streets where

nothing was in motion except things wild.

They dropped seeds singly onto the ground

and scurried away,

eyeing a swarm of pigeons cluster from their safe spot.

After those days,

the heat sank into surrounding bays at night and the phosphorescent shrimp glittered the water

with sea-shell pink,

I stood outside my door.

The gold glow from the high-rise buildings,

and the aroma filtering from the Vietnamese restaurant.

Outside my door, I stood.

Luminous views don't last much more.

LJLLY DENG

Perkiomen Valley High School

Ms. Beth Colman



